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HOW DO WE KNOW GOD?

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Logische und aesthetische Allgemeingültigkeit, 1908  
(The Validity of Logical and Aesthetical Judgments)

Zweck und Gesetz in der Biologie, 1913  
(Finality and Causality in Biological Thought)

Kant's Weltanschauung, 1914

Das Problem der historischen Biologie, 1919  
(The Problem of Historical Biology)

Von Kant bis Hegel, 1921-1924 (two vols.)

Die Selbstverwirklichung des Geistes, 1928  
(The Actuality of Mind)

Kulturphilosophische Grundlegung der Politik, 1931  
(Fundamental Principles of Politics)

The Religious Function Of Imagination,  
Yale University Press, 1941

*"The character of combined  
ultimacy and intimacy is  
the hall-mark of religion."*

C. C. J. WEBB

HEWETT LECTURES

# HOW DO WE KNOW GOD?

An Introduction to the  
Philosophy of Religion

By  
RICHARD KRONER



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HARPER & BROTHERS . Publishers  
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HOW DO WE KNOW GOD?

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FIRST EDITION

B-S

*To*

HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

*President of Union Theological Seminary*



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## PREFACE

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In the winter 1941-1942 I delivered, in accordance with the requirements of the Hewett Foundation, the following lectures at three institutions: the Union Theological Seminary, New York, the Episcopal Theological School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Andover Newton Theological School; in addition I also gave them as the Roberts Lectures at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago. I sincerely thank the Administrators of the Hewett Foundation and the Officers of these institutions for their invitation and for the kind hospitality they showed me. I was very happy indeed to obtain the opportunity to discuss the question: How do we know God, in a time when the knowledge of God is endangered by many causes and in many quarters of the world.

How do we know God? A laughing child and a happy mother, every blessed hour of our life, and the good gifts of destiny may make His charity known to us. The scent of a flower in spring or the pilgrimage of crimson clouds at a sunset in summer may reveal His beauty. The laws of nature may manifest the orderly rectitude of His world. Great works and good deeds of man may hint at His creative spiritual power. But all this would not grant us knowledge of God in the proper sense, if another, more authoritative and more authentic testimony did not exist. Indeed, this testimony alone deserves to be called revelation of God in the strict meaning of the term, since it alone reveals not only

## PREFACE

a certain goodness and beauty, a certain order and power that can be called divine, but rather God Himself, the Creator and Ruler of the World, the Judge and Redeemer of man, His counsel and His purpose, His works and His deeds. Only thus do we know Him.

In order to show that this old and sacred testimony still holds good, I had to criticize a very popular and widespread prejudice, namely the opinion that modern science is called upon to rectify, to augment, or even to produce the right knowledge of God. I felt this a necessary task the more, because my German experiences taught me how dangerous all naturalistic tendencies are in the religious field. When belief in the sciences supplants belief in the Bible, the just relation between God and man is lost. As the sciences cannot deliver a real faith, all substitutes produced by them must dissatisfy in the long run. The final outcome, therefore, of a scientific criticism or reform of faith is a longing for a "new myth," that is exploited by ambitious and unscrupulous demagogues. When the true prophets are no longer trusted, not science but the false prophet will prevail in the end.

The American people, I hope, will be secure for ever against such attacks on its religious, political, and moral life.

Mr. James A. Martin, Jr., M.A. and the Reverend Dudley D. Zuver kindly corrected the English of my manuscript; I should like to mention here once more my appreciation of their labor.

RICHARD KRONER

*New York, Christmas, 1942*



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## HOW DO WE KNOW GOD?



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## LECTURE I

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### FAITH VERSUS KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE VERSUS FAITH

#### A. EXPOSITION OF THE PROBLEM

**T**he subject dealt with in the following lectures is old, in fact it is as old as Christianity itself. When the Gospel first was preached in Athens by Paul and "certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him, and some said, What will this babbler say?"<sup>1</sup> the question arose as to how the wisdom of God made manifest in Christ is to be reconciled with the wisdom of man contained in Hellenic thought. Some Christian apologists rejected secular knowledge completely and maintained that the Word of God has made it superfluous or disclosed its falsehood. Others aspired in various ways to combine both the new knowledge based on faith and the old knowledge based on demonstration. It is the ancient and venerable problem concerning the relation between Revelation and Reason, or between revealed and natural religion, that I will discuss anew.

Though old and treated by masters of thought from century to century it is never solved, and may defy solution for ever. But the attempt has to be made regardless

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17, 18.

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of the chances of a final success, ever and ever again, since it is a vital problem that will burn as long as the Christian faith will struggle against a secular culture, that is, presumably, as long as time will last.

In the present time this ancient problem has assumed a new importance and reached a new crisis. The old opposition has been formulated with fresh zeal, which, on both sides, amounts almost to fanaticism. While in the political world Christian and antichristian powers clash on tremendous battlefields, the struggle in the spiritual field is no less fierce and desperate. Secular knowledge has increased in weight and in proportions ever since the Renaissance. It has changed the world, and it has produced a philosophy adapted to these changes. But the Word of God, never forgotten, purified and restored to its original force and holiness by the great Reformers, is still alive in our time. The tension between these opposite poles of Western civilization has not relaxed nor weakened, on the contrary it has increased and it has engendered impressive manifestations on the part of both antagonists: the theology of crisis initiated by the prophetic Socratism of Søren Kierkegaard on the one hand, and on the other the theology of empiricism as developed out of the natural sciences. What standpoint should we adopt to adjudicate the claims of these rival contenders?

In asking the question: How do we know God? we are in danger of making religion more intellectual than it really is. This danger is always present when one abandons the naïve attitude toward God, characteristic of worship and piety, and begins to reason *about* God and

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to think *about* religion. The activity of reasoning and thought is philosophic, not religious. It compels us to intellectualize the object of attention, be it God or anything else. We then strive to transform God, the living God, to whom we turn in prayer and adoration, into a concept. We are inclined to overestimate the part the intellect plays in religious life, and accordingly the part which is taken by knowledge in our living relation to God. Even great theologians have fallen victims to the pretensions of the intellect and have overrationalized faith and its content, under the influence of Greek or Roman philosophic thought. The young Augustine confesses frankly that he demands to know the deity as well as to worship God. Faith alone does not satisfy him. The thinker, discontented with simple devotion, longs for an additional knowledge, not yet disclosed in Scripture. The worshiper and the man who endeavors to live a God-pleasing life feel that God is a mystery never to be fully grasped by means of knowledge; that theoretical questions concerning the nature of Him who dwells in the light which no man can approach, are neither appropriate nor answerable. Their trust is not disturbed by their ignorance; on the contrary their awe forbids them to put questions which tend to diminish the infinite distance between the Eternal and mortal men, and which assault the majesty of the Most High.

The attitude of the philosopher differs widely from the innocence and humility of the naïve believer. He tries deliberately to exchange simple devotion for the learned knowledge of the scholar, and the dogmatic theologian follows the philosopher closely in this ambi-

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tion. Both stress the part knowledge plays in religion. Speaking of the difference between natural and Christian religion, C. C. J. Webb says, "Religion is regarded by both parties as consisting in, or at least as dependent upon, knowledge, knowledge of the existence and nature of God."<sup>2</sup> A modern philosopher like Benedetto Croce goes even so far as to assert that "religion is nothing but knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

The worshiper is not used to discoursing about God or about religion. He therefore cannot plead his point of view. In so doing, he would abandon it. Though he may be right as against the thinker who claims to be superior to him, the theologically unlettered but ardent believer could not defend his position. He has no voice in the erudite discussion of the scholars. He is by nature mute. Precisely his fervent reverence, his simple devotion, his humility, make him unable and even unwilling to participate in the arguments about the nature of God, be they theological or philosophical. He prefers to pray, and to sing, and to honor God by his way of living, by his good deeds. If he chooses the ministry for a career, he practices his vocation by preaching and consoling and educating his fellow men. But he avoids metaphysical matters. If he is a genius, his words seem inspired and his spirit acquires a prophetic character. But he engages in no dialectics. He does not demonstrate what he knows. He never strays from the realm of religious images. A strictly theoretical understanding of God is never his ideal nor his concern. How then does he know God, and how far is his untheoretical knowledge true?

<sup>2</sup> *Kant's Philosophy Of Religion*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Estetica*, Engl. translation, vol. I, ch. 8, p. 102.



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This problem is the more conspicuous within the Christian religion, for this religion more than any other, emphasizes man's ignorance with respect to the mystery of God; it stresses that not the learned, but the childlike are nearest to God. "The Gospel makes the simple wise"; it is proclaimed for those who are poor in spirit; only they can enter the kingdom of God, who have become as little children. A certain foolishness seems to be the very condition for the right knowledge of God. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"<sup>4</sup> Therefore from the outset we must carefully avoid the typical error of those who are possessed of too insatiable a thirst for knowledge. We must make it our duty to interpret the knowledge of God in the spirit, and after the manner, of those who desire neither the interpretation nor the knowledge itself. We must argue the cause of those who do not care for argument. We must discuss our problem as those might discuss it who refuse to discuss it at all. Whatever our philosophic standpoint and the aspirations of our philosophic knowledge, we must respect and protect "the foolishness of God" and the childlike ignorance of the believer. This may be difficult, but it is imperative.

There is another difficulty in discussing a problem like this. This difficulty concerns the standpoint we should adopt with respect to our personal religious belief. We can approach the problem of religious knowledge as men who accept a definite faith and adhere to a definite creed. This is the usual standpoint of the theo-

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. 1, 20.

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logian. Or we can take our standpoint outside every definite religion and confession, as neutral spectators of the world wherein religious phenomena occur like other phenomena, then describe and analyze those types of phenomena, and especially types of knowledge pertaining to them. This is the standpoint of the scientist, and often of the modern philosopher of religion. Each of these opposite viewpoints has its own advantage, but also each is in a particular way deficient. If we deal with a problem as outsiders we may be able to look at the phenomena with a high degree of objectivity and thus to reach a truth not affected by our prejudices and preconceptions. It is the fashion of science to dispense with all personal bias and to discern in the data alone their nature and their truth. Objectivity is the very heart of scientific methods and conclusions. A scientific description and definition of religious knowledge seems therefore to be attainable only if we adopt the principle of impartiality and impersonality. But this attitude has its disadvantage. Religion is found in the inner realm of the soul. To be sure, religion issues in behavior which appears in the world of outer phenomena. But its real meaning cannot be understood or studied from without. A person who does not share in religious faith cannot enter the inner experience which alone enables him to comprehend the real meaning of certain outer appearances, as a man who is tone deaf cannot comprehend the true nature of music. A certain body of scientific knowledge may possibly be achieved by way of objective treatment even in the field of religion. But such knowl-

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edge must remain superficial after all; it cannot satisfy the whole philosophic need.]

If, on the other hand, we deal with the problem of religious knowledge as religious men, having a definite belief, we enjoy the advantage of an inner experience and of an intimate relation to the object of our inquiry. But we lose the virtue of the disinterested observer, and we meet the danger of taking certain preconceptions for granted. We are attacked by scientists for discovering only what we personally wish to discover. We are accused of having loaded the dice. How then should our quest proceed? Where should we choose to stand? Outside of every definite religious belief, on an impartial and impersonal ground, or within the confines of our own religious faith, as believers?

I think that there is no real alternative. Since the scientist as such cannot reach the intimate knowledge demanded by the object of our inquiry, we cannot choose his attitude. We must venture to think as believers; only so can we hope to attain to a true understanding of the knowledge of God, as immanent in our belief. Otherwise we could not fulfill the task we have undertaken. It is precisely the lack of belief in the religious sense of the word that misleads a philosopher like Benedetto Croce to interpret religion as a kind of undeveloped philosophic knowledge. Our problem must be dealt with by concrete persons, because we as persons are concerned with the knowledge of God. We cannot discuss it with the abstract intellect only, presuming we are not interested in the meaning and truth (or untruth) of the knowledge of God; or assuming that this knowledge can be regarded

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as a merely intellectual, impersonal cognition. We must not ignore, but, on the contrary, consider the peculiar interest that we take in its truth. Let us not deceive ourselves into striving after the ideal of a purely scientific answer, since such an answer cannot correspond with the real character of the knowledge of God into which we inquire. The advantage of scientific objectivity would be no advantage in our case. If we, on the other hand, truly understand the character of religious subjectivity we will no longer regard it as a disadvantage to be fettered by it.

No philosopher has ever taken a neutral attitude in the study of religion and in the comprehension of its nature. The pretension of objectivity often disguises the fact that the philosopher denies the validity of a definite or of any religious knowledge in advance; and in so doing is as biased as the most arrogant defender of a specific creed or dogma. Not only are we unable to comprehend the true nature of faith, if we do not partake in it. If we share the faith, we know that the object of religious knowledge cannot be grasped by means of "pure reason" or by disinterested, strictly scientific methods of investigation; that the link between faith and God is indissoluble, or in other words that faith is the indispensable precondition of the knowledge of God. This has to be respected and considered by the philosopher. Being at the same time a believer, the philosopher is aware of this personal union. Only so can he reflect on the strange character of this union, and discuss the problem that arises out of it. The highest and the most urgent goal of philosophy is this self-understanding of

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the whole man. Philosophy is not a pursuit of the abstract intellect or of an artificially isolated "knowing subject." We philosophize as concrete persons living in a concrete world. Only if we keep in mind the actual situation can we attain to the truth about our place in the Universe and about our relation to God. ?

Not knowledge then, but faith is the basis and the center of the religious life. Our attitude toward God ceases to be religious (and therefore an attitude toward God), if we take a stand as indifferent and impartial as we take when we study phenomena like electricity or a chemical substance, a geometrical figure or the movement of the planets (by Aristotle still reckoned amongst the metaphysical objects, akin to the deity). God, as Scripture presents Him, is not an object of metaphysical speculation, but the object of faith. Knowledge of God is encompassed in faith. Faith therefore is not, as often is said, even by theologians who should know better, a lower degree of knowledge; it is something wider than all knowledge, something different in principle from all knowledge. The term "belief" should not deceive us. It is sometimes used in the sense of a knowledge not yet sufficiently verified.<sup>5</sup> But religious belief is not such a theoretical knowledge of lower certainty.

Faith is not an assumption, nor an assent to a series of propositions (as Cardinal Newman holds), nor, as Kant thinks, a postulation, nor a scientific hypothesis

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lord Balfour, *The Foundation Of Belief*. D. C. Macintosh speaks of "belief about God," instead of belief in God, thereby indicating that he conceives of belief as a kind of hypothesis ("Experimental Realism In Religion" in *Religious Realism*).

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which could and should be verified by subsequent experiment. Faith, in the religious sense of the word, is an absolutely unique and peculiar attitude in which intellect and heart, imagination and conscience collaborate, an attitude not to be achieved by man, but by God. This character of religious faith does not imply an uncertainty as does the character of intellectual belief. To be sure, religious belief has not the same certainty as scientific knowledge; the difference between them, however, does not affect the degree, but rather the source and the nature of certainty. Faith does not mean trust in the logical truth of a proposition or in the validity of a system of propositions, although faith may receive its formulations and its articles may be arranged in a system.) Primarily, faith is the trust in reality or in destiny controlled by the living God. Faith is a kind of personal confidence akin to the confidence a man may cherish toward his mother, his father, or his friend. It is a nonintellectual attitude, or more strictly, an attitude not exclusively intellectual. Thus faith can be accompanied by a certainty of the highest degree that needs no further confirmation by new facts, and that could not be heightened by additional investigations.

Although this is undoubtedly the true nature of religious faith, we cannot deny that there is an element of knowledge in it. Otherwise the misinterpretation of faith as a lower degree of knowledge would never have occurred. We cannot believe in God without knowing Him in a specific manner. Faith is not mere emotion as some utterances of Schleiermacher would suggest; it is not "the feeling of an unconditional dependence." Other-

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wise Hegel would be right in his objection that then the dog would be the best Christian. There is a special kind of knowledge involved in faith. But to concede this does not involve agreeing with the doctrine of Hegel that knowledge is the essence of faith. If Hegel were right, then indeed philosophy would be entitled and called upon to transform religious knowledge into the form of pure thought; the true knowledge of God would be disclosed by philosophy more adequately than by revelation. This conclusion we must reject, and therefore we must also reject the principle on which it is based. Knowledge is not the essence of faith, but there is a certain knowledge comprised in faith. This is a strange kind of knowledge, since faith always purports a corresponding foolishness as its intrinsic character. We know God as a Being we can never really know! "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?" Precisely because we know God by faith, we know that we cannot know Him by means of intellect. Religious knowledge includes obedience and reverence to God, sentiments or attitudes incompatible with autonomous objective knowledge. God would no longer be God if we could know Him without faith, or in a way independent of faith.

But it is also true: we cannot obey God, we cannot fear and love Him, we cannot worship Him without to a certain degree and in a certain way knowing Him. This knowledge admits of degrees of truth. Primitive ideas of God are erroneous or inadequate. They are superseded,

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gradually, progressively, till the advent of the Christian revelation. To be sure, if we speak of God we mean the true God and not the deity of more or less superstitious religions. Primitive peoples worship idols, fetishes, gods; even highly cultivated peoples did and do not know the living God as He appears in Scripture. This is an illustration of the principle that knowledge of God is an element of faith, immanent in faith. When we believe in God, we believe in the truth of the knowledge of God, as conveyed by faith. There are degrees of truth in religious ideas, as their development in history reveals.

There is a development of religious knowledge as there is a development of scientific knowledge from a condition of error to a state of truth. As alchemy is an erroneous system of chemistry, so superstitious rites are genuine but fallacious efforts to achieve true religion. In religion, as in science, development can be traced from lower stages to higher levels. Even within revealed religion the knowledge of God is growing and deepening. But this knowledge can never be isolated and abstracted from the living faith. True knowledge of God depends on the true faith. Solomon strays from truth, because he abandons the living fellowship with the true God; "because his heart was turned from the Lord."<sup>6</sup> The element of knowledge within revealed religion seems to be emphasized in the New Testament over against the Old Testament, especially in the fourth Gospel. Here the Logos of Greek philosophy and the Logos of Christ seem to merge. The Gospel seems to assume the

<sup>6</sup> I Kings 11, 9.



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legitimate station held by philosophic knowledge. But even so it has not become philosophy; on the contrary, the knowledge of God is consummated in "life eternal": "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

The peculiar nature of religious knowledge consists in its close union with the nonintellectual sectors of the human mind and soul. The whole person is involved in this knowledge. Its truth concerns not only and not primarily the theoretical realm of ideas, concepts, propositions, but rather the desires, wishes, anxieties, ends, and aims of the human heart and will. The truth of religion cannot be known as can the truth in mathematics and physics, for these are not related to man's happiness and destiny as is religion. In this sense the truth of the knowledge of God is by necessity subjective. The deficiency of natural religion derived mainly from the fact that it neither meets nor serves practical needs and exigencies; it is, in other words, not genuinely religious. It offers instead an intellectual substitute for the religious knowledge of God, that cannot set the heart on fire nor transform the will. But how can a knowledge, stimulated and suggested by man's practical needs and desires, by his wishes and affections, his longing and his fear, claim to be true? This is the intricate problem raised by the question, how we know God. It seems that religious knowledge, by reason of its close relation to human needs, should be condemned to remain fanciful, sentimental, based on wishful thinking, and therefore highly suspicious as to its truth value. How can a knowledge rooted in emotions and volitions of the human soul

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and aiming at man's salvation make good its boast to truth? Are we not obliged to admit that no sharp boundary line can be drawn between superstition and the presumed knowledge of God, that this knowledge at root is superstitious itself, and on the level not of chemistry, but of alchemy?

If we confine the meaning of the term knowledge to its scientific use, then of course we must concede that this question be answered in the affirmative. Consequently, all scientists who insist on the principle that the only possible and legitimate criterion of truth is that practiced in the natural sciences, and that the only genuine standard of knowledge is that of empirical objectivity, must deny the character of knowledge to revealed religion. On the other hand all religious men who believe in the content of their faith must deny that scientific knowledge is the only legitimate kind of knowledge altogether and that scientific truth embraces all truth. They must insist that there is a truth never to be attained by the methods and procedures of science, and they must maintain that this truth concerns the supreme interests and the loftiest needs of the human soul.

Indeed, all the questions that have to do with the inner meaning and worth of life cannot be answered by science. Science determines the realm of conditions and means, not the realm of persons and purposes. Science cannot decide on the issues of life, it cannot even define the term "life" in the human sense. The meaning of life cannot be formulated by means of objective knowledge. Life is neither fact nor process as conceived or conceivable by the natural sciences. Its very essence lies

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beyond the horizon of disinterested investigation, for it is this very essence to be interested the way science itself is interested in truth. A knowledge concerning the meaning of life should teach us how to deal with blows of destiny and qualms of conscience, how to bear injustice and persecution, how to defy suffering, how to overcome the loss of beloved persons, how to help spiritually those who are the object of hate and misfortune. It is a highly interested knowledge that alone can perform this task. Is the knowledge of God perhaps able to perform it, precisely because it is not objective and not scientific? Is the knowledge of God perhaps so personal and so emotional and so imaginative as it really is, just because it is adapted to the peculiar end it fulfills? Science is confined to the sphere of facts and processes, while ultimate truth answers questions raised by man as a person that aims at ultimate purposes. Is the knowledge of God the knowledge of ultimate truth? It is this problem that I am going to discuss in the following lectures.

### B. SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

It is now clear that the compass of reality is too wide to be wholly embraced by empirical science or by a philosophy which arbitrarily extends the principles of scientific methods. The objects studied by science and falling within the range of possible scientific investigation constitute only the environment of our lives, the stage on which the drama of human life takes place. The theatrical properties cannot determine or interpret what happens on the stage, though they contribute to the play

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the framework of its action. So no event in human life, dependent on the realm of things, investigated by science though it may be, can be interpreted in terms of scientific method alone.

Nothing can happen to us that contradicts the rules of nature; such a negative statement however yields no positive interpretation of the essence, the meaning, the end of human life. This interpretation can never be drawn from the rules of nature, be they physical or psychological rules. It demands not disinterested observation and analysis, but an inner participation in life itself. It demands not a neutral spectator, but a soul that can sympathize with other souls, a will that can understand the purposes of other wills, a mind that can speak to the mind. Nature taken as the field of the natural sciences is only an abstract fragment of the wider and more concrete world in which we suffer and act, wish and strive, fight and love, live and die. This concrete world should not be narrowed to fit a pseudo-scientific philosophy (that is, a philosophy which pretends to be scientific like the natural sciences). It resists intrinsically the attempt to be explained by abstract conceptions used in the sciences. It demands a concrete interpretation expressed in the language of life, that appeals to the will and heart, and not to the bare intellect alone. This demand is respected and fulfilled by religious knowledge. It should cause little wonder then that this knowledge deviates so noticeably from the model and standard of scientific knowledge. Its origin and its task, its nature and its function, deviate likewise widely from their counterparts in the natural sciences.

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The consciousness of God is bound up with such emotions as confidence, fear, love, gratitude, and hope, because God is related to the believer as a person to a person, or in personal intimacy. Only a being that enjoys a personal life, and only on the ground of this life, can attain therefore to a knowledge of God. God cannot be known save in personal intimacy. The emotions accompanying the knowledge of God are not merely a secondary effect. They are a substantial element in it, as such feelings are an essential element in the personal knowledge of father, brother, friend. No one can know the meaning of these words without being personally related to the persons named. The relation between father and son, to be sure, has a natural foundation that pertains to the range of biological knowledge. But this natural foundation does not exhaust the meaning of the relation, in fact it does not involve it. The brute animals too are naturally related like parents and children, but the spiritual meaning of this relation is lacking in animal life though certain emotions may be present in it. It is the spiritual meaning that makes the relation human and personal. This meaning cannot be known without a personal experience. The same personal experience is needed in the relation between man and God, and without this experience no knowledge of God can ever be appropriated.

Sympathy is not only one of the vital preconditions of social life, it is also a precondition of social knowledge. We can attain no knowledge of persons if we cannot feel what they feel, if their personal life does not evoke a sympathetic response in us. Even the his-

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torian who endeavors without partiality to depict the character and temper of men acting and suffering on the stage of historic life, arouses in us such a response, and only so are we able to learn from his reports what happened in the past. He cannot help admiring heroism and despising cowardice, loving selflessness and shuddering at cruelty; indeed he could not even discern those virtues and vices if he were not a man capable of the emotions occasioned by them.

It is true that love makes the lover blind. But it is also true that the blinding love makes him see what he could never have seen without it. Persons are not only creatures of the natural order, acting and reacting like chemical materials. They are inwardly different from physical bodies and from biological animals in so far as they are human persons. This is so self-evident that only a mind perfectly possessed by the idea of scientific truth can disregard it; only in an epoch in which this idea prevails to such an extent as it does in our epoch is it necessary to dwell on this self-evident insight into the nature of the human person and to safeguard the knowledge based upon this insight. The knowledge of God is akin to social knowledge. It cannot be obtained without a personal sympathy for other persons and without a personal relation to the highest person who is the father of all men.

Despite the infinite distance separating man and God, man can experience God in his personal life. He has silent intercourse with the Lord, to whom he is ultimately accountable. This is a miracle indeed. But so is our very life, our existence as persons, our moral re-

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sponsibility, and most of all the alarming fact that we cannot fulfill moral commands without the capacity also to trespass against them. The knowledge of God is thus tied up with the mystery of our personal life. It is a secret conversation with the Judge and Lord of life. It is a knowledge in which, therefore, conscience and heart play an indispensable role. "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord."<sup>7</sup>

Scientific belief is the first step to scientific knowledge; religious or spiritual knowledge is a vehicle of religious or spiritual belief. Knowledge is the very substance of science, belief the subjective side only that can be neglected in the final summation. Belief, on the contrary, is the very essence of religion; knowledge belongs to the subjective side that can never be adequate to its object. Science creates a system of propositions accepted as objectively true; religious faith is inseparably connected with the subjectivity of the believers. The object of science does not include the scientists; the object of faith does include the devout; indeed it concerns his obligations and his destiny. Religious or spiritual faith unites both objective creed and subjective belief. There is no analogous word in the language of science. We can speak of a "faith in science," but not of a scientific faith. Scientific faith is neither faith nor science; taken as a faith in the religious sense, it would be a kind of a learned superstition replacing the genuine religious faith by an intellectual substitute. It would be a scientific religion, that is, a contradiction in terms like "Christian Science." The expression "faith in science"

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah, 24, 7.

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suggests that we personify science, and that we entertain a kind of trust and confidence in it as in a person. "Faith in science" no longer characterizes the logical value of objective certainty, that is of sufficiently proved truth of scientific theories, laws, statements, and so forth; it rather characterizes the practical value science may have in our life, and the subjective certitude we enjoy in using science for our purposes, in the realm in which we as persons live. We can trust science in this sense; as scientists we can even love science. But this attitude does not concern the objective realm of knowledge and truth, it concerns rather our own activity in discovering this knowledge and truth, in producing the results which contribute to the fabric of science. The personal affections connected with scientific research and study do not figure in the content of scientific knowledge and truth; they do not belong to the realm investigated by science. They belong to our personal life, and they are ultimately related to the ultimate meaning of life as revealed and expressed in religion. They hint at the fact that the ultimate meaning of life as the object of personal affections presupposes a personal source, that is, an Author of life itself. They suggest that life in the sense of human life cannot be interpreted exclusively as a natural or physical process caused by definite physical forces or factors, and these alone.

The knowledge of God being personal and emotional may appear to its adverse critics to be a somewhat childish and not very trustworthy kind of cognition, when measured by the standard of science. But scientific knowledge on the other hand, similarly measured from the view-



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point of religion, appears to be a very narrow and unimportant field of truth, being restricted to objects which have little meaning to our inward life and to our spiritual needs. Precisely that which constitutes the honor and glory of science is a deficiency and shortcoming in the sphere of religious life and knowledge, just as that which constitutes the peculiar worth and splendor of the knowledge of God, has no place in, and would constitute a serious menace to, scientific investigation and discovery. Thus religious and scientific procedure mutually exclude yet supplement each other, as two different members of the body exclude and supplement each other having different functions, but supporting the life of the same body, and therefore of each other. If the brain usurped the duties of the heart, the result would be disastrous for the life of the organism whose parts both are; likewise it would be disastrous for the life of the spirit, if science would usurp the functions of religion. Scientific religion is as calamitous as a science based on personal intuitions not confirmed by experiment.

The members of a living body do not compete with one another as long as the body is healthy and unimpaired. The same is true with the body of culture and of spiritual society. When the various organs fail to co-operate and function together, when religion decays and science pre-empt its role and seeks to do what religion alone can and should perform, then the spirit of society is sick and cannot normally act and react. To the philosopher belongs the difficult and responsible office of a physician. He is expected and obliged to order

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and to rectify the confused state of the cultural body. Of course, he cannot do more than is undertaken by the medical doctor. He cannot revive what is dead, and he cannot substitute his medicines for the free and vital use of a limb. But he can teach man to avoid a false use of his mental capacities and to restore the right order of his mental functions. The means at the disposal of the philosopher-physician are spiritual. When the hypertrophical, abnormal growth of science or politics or economics has been arrested and proper co-ordination re-established, the power of religion will display itself.

The body of science can be dissected, and the separate parts arranged in such a way that they form a series approaching religion in respect to the nature of the knowledge they contain. Most remote from religious knowledge is mathematics. Thus it is no accident that mathematics is the science which exceeds all others in demonstrative truth and exact proofs. No subjective impression or perception, no personal or even emotional element whatsoever vitiates mathematical formulae. Some mathematicians or philosophers of mathematics assert that the axioms underlying mathematical demonstrations are the more or less arbitrary product of man's creative intellect; but this problem concerns not the validity of mathematical truth, rather the metaphysical foundation of this validity; it is of no moment in our present considerations. In the area of the material disciplines like physics and chemistry the subjectivity of sense perception unfolds its purport. No experiment is demanded to confirm or to refute a mathematical proposition; there are no hypothetical assumptions in this ideal

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science, and no errors are possible based on subjective hallucinations or sense illusions; there is almost no dispute about the truth or untruth of mathematical statements. Rational stringency and exactitude reigns in this kingdom with absolute supremacy unrestricted and unabated by subjective encroachments whatsoever. Thus mathematical comprehension is most remote from the personal and subjective sphere of the knowledge of God and its intimate inwardness.

To be sure, mathematical truth takes a part even in personal life, inasmuch as this life is lived in the world of facts and processes, in the realm of space and measurable time; or, to put it in other words, as we live in the objective world to be explored and investigated by the mathematical methods of the natural sciences. But though inescapable, mathematical order is not the order of spiritual life. Mathematical truth is the most impersonal, and precisely therefore the least meaningful, the most abstract and empty of all regions of truth. Ancient thinkers have spoken of the music of the spheres, and this idea is still alive even in modern times. But music is not mathematics though both are related to each other. This relation hints at a deeper meaning of the mathematical order, a meaning that may even border the ultimate meaning of reality, and thus the realm of the knowledge of God. But this bond between mathematics and metaphysics does not diminish the distance between mathematical methods on the one hand and religious devotion on the other. All sciences reach the limit where metaphysics begin, and metaphysics, as we will see later, is pertinent to the knowledge of God in a certain way.

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But this insight does not change the station of mathematics as the remotest link in the chain of the sciences approaching the intimacy of religious knowledge. Mathematics though the most certain is the most unlike religion of all human disciplines.

The sciences next to mathematics in this epistemological chain are those which depend not only on the pure understanding and on pure intuition, but also on sense perception, and which therefore contain an element of subjectivity absent from pure mathematics. This element compels science to invent special methods appropriate to neutralize and to objectivize the subjective content of sensation and its influence on the result of experiments. Again it is mathematics which is most effective for this purpose. Mathematical methods applied in the laboratories of physics and chemistry are the surest route to the goal of objective truth; thereby the transformation of sense data into measurable factors is achieved. Because it was less mathematical, ancient physics was less reliable and less correct than modern science. To substitute mathematical terms and equations for all sensory contents is the ideal of the scientific interpretation of the world in space and time. Modern physics was driven to the principle of relativity in order to take the subjectivity of the individual standpoint of the observer into the final account. Scientific relativity aims to get rid of the relativity of scientists as individual persons.

But the more we succeed in eliminating all subjective conditions and factors the more we deprive the world in which we live as persons of its peculiarity as immediately experienced, of its riches, and of the host of mean-

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ings it has for us. We have to pay for the achievement of objective truth with the loss of content within it. We arrive at a truth almost as certain and demonstrable as that of pure mathematics; but we sacrifice the features of the world most pertinent to us in our personal affairs. The world as a whole and the world that concerns us as whole men is as little a world of physics as it is a world of pure mathematics. Ours is a concrete world, that is, a world which corresponds to us as concrete persons. The whole of our world can only be experienced by the whole person within us. This world shows mathematical regularity in its outer appearance, but this mathematical regularity does not disclose its inner meaning; not even its outer appearance is to be exhausted by means of mathematical comprehension.

There are other natural sciences which are also engaged in the investigation and explanation of this visible world, but which do not, or do not only, apply mathematical methods. Chemistry is not as mathematical as physics, biology in all its various branches is even less. Indeed, the idea of an organism resists the attempt of a mathematical knowledge, for it is the idea of a whole that is not composed like a sum or like a mass of homogeneous particles, not even like a conglomerate of heterogeneous parts gathered together by physical or chemical forces; it is a whole that has a certain organizing power over its constituents so that these constituents serve the purpose of the whole to preserve its integrity—that is, to live. Biological life is the lowest form of life, nevertheless it is life and being life it has a certain purpose or meaning, though this purpose is not yet conscious

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and this meaning is not yet known by the organism. It is an objective process, but a process that approaches the subjectivity of the conscious self. The organism can be conceived as a physical self. Only so has the idea of self-preservation its organic purport. We can be conscious selves, solely because we are organisms; spiritual life is impossible (so far as we know) if it is not supported by physical life. The organism embodies the transition from the lifeless unconscious nature to the realm of human life. Psychology therefore and sociology are still nearer to the concrete state of our world than biology.

The sciences of man are at once natural and historical. The human individual and human society are involved in a process different from the processes of subhuman nature, inasmuch as spiritual life differs from simply organic life. We call this process historical development and we try to describe and to understand it by means of the science of history. Whereas in all sciences of nature the standard of impersonal and impartial objectivity has to be respected as the standard of truth, although this standard cannot be carried through in all departments of nature with the same rigor as in mathematics, in the realm of history no longer does this standard obtain or direct our procedures. To be sure, historical knowledge in the modern sense claims to be objective too. We want to know how things really happened (as Ranke formulated the goal of modern history); we do not want to see historical reality reflected in the individual mind of the historian. But we also know that this is a postulate never to be perfectly fulfilled. As mathematical methods meet an unsurmountable obstacle in striving after an ade-

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quate application in the field of organic life, thus the entire ideal of objective knowledge suffers a severe setback on the plane of human history. Is it not probable that this impediment is due to the attempt of a knowledge the object of which is man as a person living his personal life?

Indeed, a certain kind of subjectivity seems to be the prize to be paid when we try to comprehend the concrete historical life of man. Precisely because we meet in history persons like ourselves, we can no longer keep the objectivity of the natural sciences. The historical persons live a meaningful life distinctly different from the physical life of the organisms, and the historian has to understand and to interpret the actions and the will of the persons to whom he refers. A certain selection of persons and facts to be recalled and a certain valuation of the import of historical events and movements is indispensable. A Protestant cannot be supposed to write Catholic Church history in Catholic terms; he cannot judge Luther as Luther is judged by a disciple of Loyola—the very facts must appear in different lights, and therefore as different facts, since it is the light by which we see facts in history that makes them the facts they really are; the meaning and the fact cannot be fully separated in the realm of historical life.

The historian was a human being before he applied himself to history; and only because he is a human being is he able to do his work. He cannot supersede his concrete personality by an abstract understanding and leave behind his knowledge of human life and human persons, as the mathematician, the physicist, the chemist, the bi-

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ologist, and even to a certain degree and in some departments of his knowledge the psychologist are obliged to do. On the contrary, he needs the fullness of his personal experiences; the more and the better he knows and understands human passions and its effects, the wider is the horizon of his personal feelings and of his imagination, the better is he equipped to be a historian, the deeper will be the insights and the wiser the judgments he will form and convey. He has to be the whole man in order to comprehend whole men. He must be familiar with the depths and heights of human aspiration. He must be particularly sensitive to everything that is involved in human nature.

But though intimately bound up with the world of personal life, it is not this personal life that he lives when he attains to historical knowledge; this knowledge is not joint with his life as the knowledge of God is joint with the life of the person. There is still a considerable gap between historical and religious knowledge, though the approach of historical to religious knowledge is obvious. The historian as such is not a believer in the religious sense, but he must believe in the meaning of human life and in the values pursued in human life to be interested in the course of history. The historian is no longer a disinterested pure intellect as the mathematician has to be in so far as he is a mathematician. The historian is no longer as abstract a thinker as the scientist. But still he has to strive for the dispassionate attitude of the physical observer and investigator. He is manipulating ancient material. To the writer of history it is not *his* happiness that is at stake in the events of the past. He is not identifying his career and destiny with those of



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his subjects. His personal values and tastes do not depend on those of men he contemplates and whose deeds he records.

Historical knowledge is not religious knowledge, and the confusion of these two kinds of knowledge is pernicious to both. Nevertheless history is of all sciences we have analyzed the nearest to religious knowledge; so near indeed that the philosopher who inquires in their essence may be tempted to take historical for religious knowledge, especially when he emphasizes the historical feature in revealed religion. In the last of this series of lectures I will explicitly discuss the problem arising out of the intimate connection between history and revelation.

Religion is more personal than any science. The knowledge it demands and presents is by far more personal than history. It is man in the full totality of his human personality who is the knowing subject here. No wonder that the objective certainty is the smallest in this realm, or more precisely it is no objective certainty at all, but a certainty more intimately interwoven in the inward life of man than any scientific knowledge possibly can be. The measure of objective truth, already inadequate in the field of historical knowledge, ceases to be a reasonable standard at all in the domain of the knowledge of God. God is no possible *object* of an objective knowledge, for He can be known only in so far as He is himself a *subject*. Therefore the whole man gives himself to his belief; his knowledge of God affects his whole humanity and strains his humanity to the utmost limits. The objects of scientific knowledge belong to a precinct that lies below the level of humanity, but God belongs to the precinct that lies above this level.

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## LECTURE II

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### EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIMENT IN THEOLOGY

#### A. THE PRINCIPLE OF EXPERIMENTAL THEOLOGY

Our age is an age of a scientific and technical civilization. The natural sciences flourish, dominating all others and intruding within the realm of the spiritual life. Such a scientific civilization, despite the high degree of enlightenment it produces, or more accurately, because of this enlightenment, is exposed to serious dangers. For the natural sciences and their technical applications cannot support the whole fabric of a sound civilization. Faith is the indispensable ground on which this fabric rests, and the basic attitude toward life must always remain that kind of confidence which issues from religious belief. No matter how advanced and refined the intellect may become, it is incapable of creating a substitute for faith; on the contrary it itself needs a kind of confidence, if it is to remain creative and vigorous. The cultural disease and the religious decay of large strata of European society today partly derives from the attempt to supplant faith by knowledge, from the pretentious supposition that man can dispense with religion when he has advanced far enough in the way of scientific study. Social and political deterioration follow

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quickly from the error that a scientific philosophy has finally replaced revealed religion. Witness the effect of the philosophy of Benedetto Croce, not to speak of less learned versions of the same doctrine. Such self-deception neglects not only the value of genuine religious knowledge as contained in Scripture, but also the ancient Socratic teaching admitting human ignorance as to ultimate truth.

The immediate consequence of this neglect is not only intellectual stagnation in the sphere of metaphysics, it entails a deep misinterpretation of man's faculties altogether and of man's place in the Universe. The consciousness of man's moral frailty can no longer be preserved, when he claims self-sufficiency in the realm of knowledge. The intellectual and the moral limits of the human mind are parallel if not identical. When man believes that his intellectual powers are great enough to enable him to open the shrine of ultimate truth, then he must lose eventually the respect for an intellect higher than his own. He must lose the awe of the unfathomable, that is, the basis not only of faith but of moral humility as well. He must lose the consciousness of his being finite and created, and indulge in the conviction that his own will can fashion the moral law, and consequently there is no will higher than his own. Friedrich Nietzsche came to precisely this conclusion.

When science, therefore, overwhelms the human mind with its vauntings, and usurps the functions of religion, the true balance of man's mental capacities is destroyed; the right relation of man to the eternal mystery of the universe is disturbed. It may therefore be worth while

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to study the influence scientific principles and methods have exercised over religious and theological knowledge in our time, for even this section of knowledge has not been exempt from the general sway of the natural sciences. Edwyn Bevan writes in his significant little book *Christianity*: "The 19th century saw an advance in experimental science such as no period in the history of mankind before could show. The scientific devices which, one after another, came to furnish the life of ordinary men . . . could not fail to impress man deeply with belief in Science as the one trustworthy guide to life".<sup>1</sup> If experimental science were really and legitimately the only "trustworthy guide to life," it would be pardonable for theology to accept the methods of experiment and exact experience. Indeed, it would be imperative to do so. But would theology then still have any function left? There was a time when science lived in the shadow of religion and sought shelter in the vast edifice of a civilization whose foundation and supporting pillars was theology. Our generation, on the contrary, compels religion and theology to beg refuge in the civilization which science and technology have built, and even this shabby haven is no longer surety against the ever-growing rapacity of this modern demon. As the natural sciences were not allowed to develop in the Middle Ages, so is theology today imperiled in its very existence by the predominance of the experimental method and the spirit of empiricism.

Theology is not only threatened from without, but also from within. Not only does the invasion of the

<sup>1</sup> P. 205.

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natural sciences diminish the sovereignty and the very existence of religion as the "trustworthy guide to life," but a fifth column within theology itself supports the pretensions of the invaders by imitating their methods and principles, and by bowing abjectly before their authority. There are Quislings within the theological realm whose puppet governments yield ingloriously to the swollen power of experimental science. The aim to imitate scientific method in a sphere where it is completely inapplicable, by necessity entails the betrayal of religion and theology, and a misapprehension of the true nature of God as revealed in Scripture. Revelation ceases to possess authority of significance, and to constitute any criterion in the realm of the knowledge of God. Man arrogates to himself the right to command God as he commands energies and processes of nature, and to conceive of God as such an energy or process. The true relation between man and God is thereby perverted.

The root of this illusion and misconception is the supposition that the kind of knowledge proper to the natural sciences is the absolute model and pattern of all knowledge whatsoever. Consequently God must become a substance like those explored by chemistry, a force like those used in technics, an impersonal aspect or feature of nature, a factor in the Universe, an entity within existence, albeit the most important of all entities that exist. The Christian conception of God obviously is quite different from such a view. The God of Christianity as he reveals Himself to us is not a thing among other things, He does not belong to the created world at all, nor to any genus within it. Rather He is incomparable

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and unfathomable, the Holy One. His existence transcends all conceptions, it transcends all realms of ideas, things, and beings. He is before and beyond the world we know or ever will know. This world is in Him, He is not in this world. The doctrine of God as Creator means just this. God is no force, no factor, no actual entity, howsoever He may act within the world or even appear in it. Every method of investigation borrowed from the natural sciences must necessarily be inadequate to grasp His nature and doomed to failure in theological thought.<sup>2</sup>

Thus every experimental theology violates the majesty and offends the mystery of the Creator, the Lord, the Judge who speaks to us in the Bible. The indefeasible sin of every attempt of such a theology is to suppose that God can be detached from the concrete context of inspired imagination, that He can be separated from the living experience of a community. God being a living God, the only way of experiencing Him is by way of life, not by way of scientific experiments. We cannot inquire successfully into the nature of God by means of any observation devised for that purpose, by isolation and examination under circumstances analogous to those prepared in a laboratory; we cannot probe God, rather God probes us. We are nowise justified in forming a generic concept of the divine or in conceiving the Almighty as a "divinely functioning factor," assuming that

<sup>2</sup> This, of course, is not a new discovery; indeed, it belongs to the oldest insights of Christian thought: "God, being no subject for demonstration, cannot be the object of scientific knowledge," says Clemens Alex. Strom. IV, ch. XXIV, 156, 1.

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the Creator and Ruler of the world is a specific case of the general idea of the divine, as the light radiated from the sun is a specimen of light in general and an "optically functioning factor." If such a procedure were possible, then indeed we might avail ourselves of experimental methods, then we could fabricate a natural theology analogous to physics or optics.

Such a theology might be superior to the theology based on the New Testament; it would be a universal theology expounding laws that would rule over all the various forms of concrete and particular religions, as biology expounds general laws valid for all forms of organisms. God as we would experience Him, or rather the divine as we would experience it and experiment with it according to the proposed empirical and realistic experimental theology, would no longer possess any of the concrete features we know by faith. It would not be God as religious people understand Him. He would be an impersonal, natural power. And the concept of such a divine would be logically prior to the concrete and particular God of the Old and New Testament; it would logically determine the God who gave Moses the ten commandments on Mount Sinai, Him to whom Jesus prayed: "Father, if it be possible, if thou be willing, remove this cup. . . ."

God, the real and true God, would lose His unique majesty and supremacy. He would be degraded to the rank of a mere manifestation of the more universal divine—a specimen that under certain historic circumstances and conditions has taken shape, as life under certain geological and geographical circumstances and

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conditions is shaped in particular patterns, or as light appears in special colors and shades, if broken and reflected. Such a general natural theology would thus be superior to every special theology as the universal is logically superior to the particular in embracing all individual specimens that can be subsumed under it.

It is obvious that the logic of the natural sciences is leading to the idea of an empirical and experimental theology of the divine as a factor acting in accordance with general laws which can be investigated and stated. But there is also a practical problem that presses on the representatives of such an empirical theology, and that is assumed to be solved or to be made soluble by this theology. It is the problem of a world faith. Of course, I cannot discuss this grave and vital problem within the frame of my lectures. But I will venture to hint at its import with respect to the question, how we know God. It is suggestive to argue that the Christian religion being one of the great world religions should seek a compromise in appeasing the believers of other creeds; even Christian humility seems to demand that the Christian recognizes the mere relativity of the truth embodied in his faith. The step from such a suggestion to the further conclusion that a universal religious truth rules over all the particular forms of devotion is small, and quickly made. Is it perhaps possible to find out this universal truth by comparing all the creeds of the nations and races of the earth? Such a comparative study of religions seems to lead to the same goal as did the proposed empirical theology. Historical and scientific methods seem to point



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at the same end and to join each other in bringing it about. It is the same idea of a universal concept of the divine that is superior to all particular concepts as achieved in and propagated by the various religions of the world.

This solution of the problem of a world faith forgets however that the knowledge of God is not a scientific knowledge and that it can never be transformed into such a knowledge; that therefore the creation of a world faith cannot be the task and the achievement of any science be it an experimental or a comparative theology. God cannot be found in the way the truth about the nature of light can; even less can He or His truth be discovered by comparison of all religions, as little as a language can be created by such a comparison and by an artificial composition of the words or elements of them—although such an attempt has been made in different forms. All such rationalistic ideas and practices are abortive, because they are based on a profound misinterpretation and misconception of spiritual life. Spiritual truth is not abstract, it is as concrete as life itself; and it can be found by life alone, not by the scientific intellect, be it natural or historical or a combination of both. God is a living God, He is the Lord of life. It belongs to His unfathomable mystery why He has revealed Himself to His elect. But if we abandon His revelation we lose at the same time every knowledge of God, and no historical comparison can deliver a substitute for it, though it may exhibit interesting similarities between religions.

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### B. ILLUSTRATIONS OF "SCIENTIFIC" THEOLOGY<sup>8</sup>

We are told by the exponents of empirical theology that it is possible and desirable to apply the methods of experimental investigation and confirmation to the object of faith. This method, they assure us, will yield exact results if we propose the right questions and submit the answers issuing from our experiments to critical interpretation. Thus we can attain to scientifically demonstrated propositions like those which constitute the framework of the natural sciences, and for these we can claim a general validity and exactitude hitherto absent

<sup>8</sup> One scholar who had read the manuscript of the Hewett Lectures took exception to my presentation of the criticized views, not because he rejected the criticism, but because the authors whose views are criticized have uttered many other statements which transcend the narrow horizon of a "scientific" theology. He emphasized that this theology is to a high degree corrected and integrated by their appreciation of elements in religion not to be furnished at all by an one-sided application of scientific methods. I readily subscribe to this censure. It is quite true that Wieman as well as Macintosh share many opinions and defend many aspects of religion which cannot be brought under the title of an empirical and scientific theology, nay, which even may hardly be reconcilable to its program and its principle. Nevertheless, that scholar agreed that there is such a trend of thought in the systems of those authors and that it is important to examine it. Only this was and is the intention of the discussion in my lecture. I am not interested here in other opinions of those writers, and the question whether or not the criticized views are central in their systems is not essential within the frame of my lectures. In any case, the fact that the views I am criticizing are propounded, is symptomatic not only of their authors but also of the present period. Therefore, I had to illuminate their frailty.

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from theological doctrines. Let us examine in detail some specimens of this empirical theology.

In 1919, D. C. Macintosh published his book *Theology as an Empirical Science*. Here are the plans to guide the enterprise; here he exhibited and defended the scheme of an empirical scientific theology as the theology of experimental religion. "As human knowledge in general has been becoming gradually more scientific, it has been growing more and more evident that *the effect of science upon religious knowledge*—real or supposed—is *to be nothing short of revolutionary*."<sup>4</sup> "With the progress of science and general information, theology and religion have been developing in rationality. Instead of being rationalized out of existence, may it not be that religion and its theology are being rationalized into a universally valid and finally satisfactory form?" "And while hopelessly unscientific theological notions are being steadily eliminated by scientific thought and investigation, *may not theology itself possibly be so rejuvenated by modern methods* as to become more than ever able to give to religion the knowledge it needs?"<sup>5</sup>

In his book, *The Pilgrimage of Faith in the World of Modern Thought* (1931), Macintosh further suggests that "*modern religion* at its best is related to *primitive, superstitious religion* in much the same way as *modern science* is related to *primitive magic*."<sup>6</sup> What does the writer mean by "modern religion" in this context? The religion of Moses? Or the religion of the great Hebrew

<sup>4</sup> P. 3. The italics are mine.

<sup>5</sup> P. 5. The italics are mine.

<sup>6</sup> P. 4. The italics are mine.

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prophets? But they are not modern. Does he mean the religion of Jesus, or that of Paul? But all these elements of the Christian religion cannot be called modern. What then is "modern religion at its best"? Is it a religion supported by the knowledge of modern science? Indeed, this seems to be the opinion of the author. We are told that "the idea of a non-miraculous, dependable universe from which we may learn what to expect and how we ought to adjust ourselves" is the best contribution to modern religion; with this idea, the author says, "one begins to gain a *perception of the true meaning of the riddle of existence.*" A man who believes that the conception of nature as a non-miraculous, dependable universe, this typical preconception of modern science, can disclose the true meaning of the riddle of existence, should be obliged to think of the biblical religion as a "primitive, superstitious" form of religion; but Macintosh is not consistent and courageous enough to draw this consequence, obviously drawn by a theologian like Wieman. On the other hand, he is courageous enough to tell his Indian audience that "*the modern world-view of science with its more adequate knowledge of causality in nature and in man*" is "what traditional Indian thought needs in order to supplement what was on the whole and for the first time so well begun."<sup>7</sup> What may his Indian audience have thought of this preacher of modern science who recommended them the modern world-view of science as the best supplement of their own profound and time-honored religious views?

Similar ideas in a different context and with different

<sup>7</sup> P. 203. The italics are mine.

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emphasis can be found in the writings of Professor Wieman. "All knowledge," he writes, "must depend ultimately upon science, for science is nothing else than the refined process of knowing . . . The *knowledge of God* must be ultimately *subjected to scientific method*."<sup>8</sup> "God is superhuman, but not supernatural. He is a present, potent, operative, observable reality. He is . . . observable in the sense that the data of observation give us knowledge of him." "God, *like everything else in existence*, is a process having a distinctive pattern. The same is true of a human person, a nation, a planet. But God is distinguished from all these others by virtue of the characteristic pattern or structure, just as these are distinguished from one another."<sup>9</sup> "To show the need of method along with the innovating experience let us examine *the analogous case in the exact sciences*. The exact sciences have their innovating experience along with their technique, and these are related to one another *in the same way as experience and method are related in religion*."<sup>10</sup> "Because of the evident inadequacy of our concepts, the practical man and the mystic often claim that there is a kind of 'intuition,' or 'faith,' or Holy Ghost, which in these regions can meet our need without the help of concepts. As a matter of fact(!), an intuition is a concept(!) and so is faith(!), and so are beliefs that may come from the holy book or some other source(?). But they are concepts which have entered

<sup>8</sup> H. N. Wieman, *Religious Experience And Scientific Method*, 1927, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Is There A God?* 1932, pp. 11, 13. The italics are mine.

<sup>10</sup> *Methods Of Private Religious Living*, 1929, p. 204. The italics are mine.

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the mind *without deliberate examination and without careful testing.*"<sup>11</sup> Is this indictment aimed at Genesis too? Is it meant for the visions of men like Jeremiah or Isaiah? Is it to be maintained with respect to the intuition of Jesus? Does Professor Wieman hold that modern science really surpasses the mysticism of Paul?

In his book, *The Growth Of Religion*, the author informs us that the decay of religion in modern time is due, not to the growth of the natural sciences—though he acknowledges that the influence of science started this decline—but to the fact that modern science did not include religion in its pursuits, thus excluding religion from participation in the modern age! "We have seen the growing top of the tree of Christian faith reach into the atmosphere of modern culture which is distinguished from all other periods by the dominion of science. Therefore a little while we saw the uppermost branches of the tree wither." Why did they wither?

We should expect to be told that the spiritual form of religion and the intellectual or rational form of science are radically in opposition, and that therefore the ascent of the one could bring about the descent of the other. Nothing of the kind however is suggested by our author. Rather he concludes: "Now we can understand why. It was because scientific procedures had not yet developed those forms of apprehension that are necessary to religious living . . ." <sup>12</sup> Then why, we ask, could religious life thrive and produce its finest fruits in an age

<sup>11</sup> *The Wresle Of Religion With Truth*, 1927, p. 251. The italics are mine.

<sup>12</sup> P. 421.

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and in the midst of a people that were not yet blessed with modern science and with those forms of apprehension that are, as our author thinks, necessary to religious living? Or is it an error to suppose that religion reached its classical period with the prophets and achieved its climax with Jesus and Paul? Wieman perhaps would not hesitate to answer this question in the affirmative, frankly denying what historical Christianity maintains. Likely he would insist that modern science is the most favorable ground for the growth of religion because it alone is able to find those forms that are necessary to religious living. He is so fond of science that he is totally blind to the nature of religion and to the requisites of religious life.

An earlier theological empiricist, G. B. Smith, writes: "The assurance of the theologian has rested on the possibility of affirming the unchangeable truth of certain doctrines by the use of exact methods of research. If scientific exactness of method . . . is essential in one realm, it is inevitable that the same attention to method shall be seen to be indispensable in other realms."<sup>18</sup> This statement expresses precisely the opposite of what is true. Different kinds of knowledge demand different methods for their discovery. The exact methods of the experimental sciences are well adapted to the objects of those sciences; they were designed in order to establish a mathematical science of those quantitative relations in nature which are regular and which therefore can be submitted to a mathematical order. We have seen that

<sup>18</sup> In *Social Idealism And The Changing Theology*, quoted by D. C. Macintosh, *The Problem Of Religious Knowledge*, p. 189.

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even in the realm of the natural sciences this mathematical method meets obstacles when organic life is concerned, and that in psychology, sociology, economics, and most obviously in history, it cannot be applied with the same success. Religion is still more remote from the mathematical order of quantitative relations. Why should the standard of mathematical exactitude be the legitimate model of the knowledge of God? It is evident that this standard has here no meaning whatsoever. If the statement of G. B. Smith were right, then indeed the empirical and experimental method of Professor Macintosh would represent the highest achievement ever reached with respect to the knowledge of God.

But there is no truth in that statement and in the valuation that underlies it. And therefore the theological science worked out by Macintosh is only an example of a methodical aberration generated by the overwhelming impression of scientific progress and technical advance. One readily appreciates and learns to share the contentions of the fundamentalists, when one confronts the definitions of God offered by the empiricists, for example, the definition of Macintosh, God is "a value-producing factor in the Universe." Indeed, fundamentalists have their merits when contrasted with the empiricists; their vices dwindle by comparison. One is faced with a choice of errors. After all, the cardinal mistake of both fundamentalism and empiricism is the same. Fundamentalism strives to claim for the symbolic and imaginative elements of revealed religion a literal truth, while empiricism, in rejecting this claim, essays to create a scientific



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substitute for prophetic imagination and to harden its own language into literal truth.<sup>14</sup> \*

Professor Wieman speaks of God as "that something upon which human life is most dependent for its security, welfare and increasing abundance"; thus, he equates God with environmental factors like air, water, and light, which contribute to human welfare, and distinguishes God from the others only in that His contribution to the common end is the greatest. Wieman also defines God as "that feature of our total universe which most vitally affects the continuance and welfare of human life," or as "one of the constitutional tendencies of nature." It remains a riddle to me why Professor Wieman exalts this special tendency of nature or this particular feature of the universe by calling it "God."<sup>15</sup> I hold that the old biblical image of God, although it unfortunately is not based on an exact and scientific experience, nevertheless is more worthy of the holy name. Even the definition of Spinoza, who at least identifies God and nature, is more respectful and more adequate to the tremendous mystery that the religious man intends, when he speaks of God. The phrases of Professor Wieman may be suited to the deity of a primitive, naturalistic religion, but they

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, "A Reply To Professor Macintosh," in *The Review Of Religion*, vol. IV, pp. 304-308.

<sup>15</sup> I am not the only one who is bewildered by this use of the word. Mr. Otto, discussing the presentations of Wieman in the "First Cycle" of their "Conversation": *Is There A God?*, says: "From the fifth paragraph to the end of the paper, impersonal and personal pronouns are used indiscriminately in referring to God. The effect is bewildering, until one gives up the attempt to make sure which concept is actually preferred by the author" (p. 34).

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are certainly incompatible with the higher forms of religious experience and especially with the moral religion contained in the Bible. Therefore it has to be concluded that the empirical natural theology cannot be truly empirical nor truly natural, nor is it a theology at all measured by the Christian standard and level of the knowledge of God.

Professor Macintosh holds that we come in touch with the divine, when trying to adjust ourselves to it. "Some religious judgments may be tested scientifically (i.e. in an adequately critical, empirical way) by comparing what is affirmed in the judgment with what is directly experienced in relation to the divinely functioning reality to which religious adjustment is purposely made. As a result of this test some religious ideas will have to be rejected as not scientifically acceptable, while certain others will stand the test and may be regarded as forming a nucleus of empirically verified religious knowledge."<sup>16</sup> The terms critical, empirical, scientific, indicate how anxiously he strives to elevate despised theology to the rank of physics and chemistry.

The representative of such an undertaking would seem to look forward to the day when theology would finally succeed in emulating the exact results of those sciences, or in succumbing to them. All he ignores is the unforgettable difference between God and electricity or water. This type of revolution in theological thinking would require for its execution a kind of theological Galileo or Lavoisier, who would overthrow the naïve theories of the pre-experimental period, and establish a really reli-

<sup>16</sup> *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 187.

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able and solid knowledge of God. No longer God's own authority, His own word would be the most trustworthy source and the supreme criterion of religious truth; the Bible would be superseded by the new experimental science which would decide what is right and what is wrong in the knowledge of God previously vouchsafed by revelation. The new experimental knowledge of God would be superior to the old "prophetic method" in that it would provide us with an exact and critical procedure, whereas the prophets availed themselves of a half-mystical and half-mythical, half-emotional and half-imaginative language that may persuade or even cause raptures, but that is completely lacking in verifiable and tested statements. Macintosh goes even so far as to imitate the symbolic language used in physics and chemistry, and to regret that the equations of religious chemistry cannot be formulated with a quantitative exactitude!

Measured by the standard of the Bible, most definitions of the empirical, realistic, critical school are blasphemous and betray a level of religious experience far below that reached in the religion of revelation. If we have to pay this price to attain to scientific and experimental knowledge of God, the costs are too high. Who will gainsay it? Is it not better to resign all attempts at an experimental religion than to fall back to barbarous forms of religious life and to debase ideas of religious knowledge? This relapse, moreover, is not accidental; it cannot be avoided, because the entire program of an empirical science of God is doomed to lead to these dire extremes, since it is an offence against the living God to make Him the object of any experimental exploration.

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If He is really the Sovereign in the kingdom of morals, if He is the Creator and Judge, who knows our heart, if He really is almighty and everlasting, then it would be foolish to submit Him to the test of experiments arranged by us for the purpose of investigating His manner of behavior. This God surely is not a mere specimen of a general concept; He surely does not obey general rules that we can discover and define, no matter how exact our method may be, or how critical our judgment. The gods of other religions may obey such general laws (which then would be laws of our human kind to represent them, not laws governing God); God the Almighty is the Lord of all laws, the highest Lawgiver of nature and man, and no theology can attain to any knowledge of Him, without respecting this character. Theology turns into demonology if we follow the formula of the Experimentalists.

There is another danger lurking within such a demonology. The expression "divinely functioning factor in reality" suggests that we can use this factor for our own purposes, be they good or bad, noble or diabolic. If one can discover how a thing functions, moreover, if one can arrange one's knowledge of its functioning in an exact way, then one becomes master of it, according to the Baconian word: *Scientia est potentia*. He can compel the thing to function in such a mode that it serves his needs or desires. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the modern man believes himself autonomous and independent: being in possession of the knowledge of nature he can rule over nature, and he can apply its natural energies and materials as he chooses.

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He has become the Lord of nature, and nature has become his servant. This consideration permits us to apprehend the full meaning and implication of the experimental theology. Religious knowledge, based on the same principles and methods as the natural sciences, can be related to religious practice as the natural sciences are related to their technological applications. As our knowledge of nature, based on experiment and exact calculation, enables us to control its manifestations and to harness it to our service, so the analogous knowledge of the divine would enable us to control and to use its energy. Religious practice, thus founded upon our new scientific theology, would correspond with the modern technique. Our power, exercised over the divine element within the world, would give us infinitely more and greater opportunities for expansion than even the best technical devices. The dictum: *Scientia est potentia* would more than ever prove its truth and worth. As divine energy is more powerful than any type of physical energy (even in the theories of the experimental theologians this is admitted), so a technique of the divine would be more useful than any other kind of engineering.

G. B. Smith has bluntly drawn this conclusion. Speaking of God as the environment of the universe he says: "The supreme question for theology is to discover how this environment may be so correlated to the needy life that the fullest possible use may be made of the divine power."<sup>17</sup> This statement transforms religious practice

<sup>17</sup> When I delivered this lecture I was told by a friend of the late Professor G. B. Smith that this scholar was a profoundly devout Christian, that his whole life work was dedicated to the

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into a modern system of magic; it is the precise definition of magic that it tries to make the best use of the divine by means of human contrivances, based on the knowledge of how the divine "functions." This modern species of magic is not different from witchcraft in principle, but only in the means employed to influence the divine. In witchcraft this means is personal and mystical, whereas the modern magician employs his impersonal pseudo-scientific, experimental knowledge for the same purpose. The magician of old, I may add, was more genuinely religious than his modern successor, the experimental theologian, for he had at least sensed the tremendous mystery of the divine, and he had retained in his make-up that awe which is the basic attitude toward, and the indispensable presupposition of, any knowledge of God. The modern scientist, on the other hand, inquires impassively into this mystery as into the object of his experiments. But the true, the living God is not such an object. He does not function like

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service of his fellow men, and that his theological views also were deeply motivated by the Christian spirit. I do not doubt this fact in the least, but it shows, in my opinion only, that a good heart can be combined with a confused mind. I think, however, that theology differs from other sciences in that it has precisely the task of expressing in theoretical form what the heart feels and intends, or of reconciling mind and heart, thought and life, a task so immensely varying from that of physics or chemistry that any competition between the two realms of knowledge is completely out of place. Either has its own dignity and import, and either loses both if it pursues the methods of the other. A theology fails if it accomplishes its task by the bare intellect, as the natural sciences fail if they permit emotions and imagination to influence them.

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natural "factors." He speaks and creates, He threatens and consoles, He commands and acts, for He is not an impersonal thing, but the supreme Will. Therefore we are not entitled to use Him for any purpose of ours; on the contrary, He uses us for His ends.

Naturally, I am not the first nor the sole critic of the theological capitulation to science. As early as eighty years ago an American theologian vigorously criticized and rejected the false pretensions and illusions of a scientific theology. In a brilliant essay called "Our Gospel A Gift To The Imagination" the New England author Horace Bushnell warned: "Many are going still to think out a gospel, assuming that the Church has no other hope as regards this matter but in the completing of a scientific theology; which will probably be accomplished about the same time that words are substituted by algebraic notations, and poetry reduced to the methods of the calculus or the logarithmic tables. There was never a hope wider of reason."<sup>18</sup>

And more recently also criticism has not failed to characterize the weakness of all pseudo-scientific schemes in the realm of theology. Even in a volume dedicated to Professor D. C. Macintosh with the title *The Nature Of Religious Experience*, the doctrine of empirical theology has been severely taken to task. E. G. Bewkes sums up his judgment in the words: "The terminology of science does inadequate justice to the realm of religion with its intimate personal relationships"<sup>19</sup>; and Pro-

<sup>18</sup> *Building Eras in Religion*. Literary Verities III. Cent. Ed. 1903, p. 274. I am indebted to President Henry S. Coffin for this quotation.

<sup>19</sup> *The Nature of Religious Experience*, p. 24.

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fessor Thomas writes in his essay: "It is difficult to see how a purely scientific objective approach to religious experience would be possible; or if possible, how it could yield conclusions important for religion."<sup>20</sup> I think that the foregoing considerations have shown that such an approach is not possible indeed, and that therefore the conclusions drawn from the false premises are not important either. On the contrary, the level of religious thought would sink if this approach were followed. Religion would soon cease to animate and strengthen the heart and soul of men.

If the arguments against the principle and method of an experimental theology do not seem sufficiently conclusive and decisive, the oddity and meagerness of the results should persuade even the most arduous adherent of this school that its method does not lead to any knowledge "important for religion." The "elemental" law, stated by Macintosh, confirms the objections quoted by himself as raised against this type of laws, namely that they concern the nature of man alone, and not the nature of God and His activity.<sup>21</sup> The law has the following wording: "A divinely functioning reality, on condition of the right religious adjustment for a specific volitional effect (the promotion of the good will) tends to produce a desirable change in that direction in the

<sup>20</sup> l. c. p. 50. Cf. also the essay of Professor Vergilius Ferm who says: "The way opened by a religious critically realistic epistemology . . . has not met with the general approval that one might expect among theologians. Objections came in the form of disagreement with definitions, with epistemological and ontological theories . . ." l. c. p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 198.



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will and character of the individual concerned, and this may be regarded as the basic, dependable answer to prayer."<sup>22</sup> Should this law prove true, or should the truth at which the law aims be correctly expressed in it, man would be able to determine God by application of the adequate technical means, as he is able to determine nature in an analogous way.

This assumption contradicts radically the genuine implication and the true spirit of prayer. Prayer must be grounded in faith. But here the hope of a devout heart is transformed into the certainty of an objective law that functions with the same necessity as the law of gravitation. If "adjustment" means that the one who prays strengthens his good will, the law is tautological; if it does not mean this "desirable change," but one produced by the "divinely functioning reality," the law is not "dependable" at all, since God often does not answer our prayers in the manner we expect. If we could rely on prayer the way a scientist or technician relies upon his knowledge of the naturally functioning reality, our attitude toward God would change completely. It would no longer be the attitude of love, reverence, fear, gratitude, humility. Our prayer would lose the spirit distinctive of prayer. When we pray, we do not proceed as technicians; we do not exercise any domination over God by anticipating exactly His response. We appeal to His inscrutable grace. It is His will, not our own, that we yearn to have done.

It is evident that the law does not express any necessary tendency to action on the part of God, but instead

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit., p. 203.

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a tendency on the part of man. A man who fears and loves God is a good man, and he will supposedly act like a good son toward his father. It was not necessary to establish an experimental theology to discern this insight: it is as old as religious life, in any case, as old as that religious life which acknowledges the moral authority of God, or the authority of the moral God who reveals Himself in the Bible. It is not a truth based on a scientific experiment, and found by a critical method, like the truth of natural laws. The "elemental law" concerns the connection between prayer and human volition; it does not state anything about the nature of a divine reality and its modes of functioning. Even a cynic who would deny the existence of God could concede that a man who sincerely prays tends to improve his character. The conviction that this agreement between devotion and character is accomplished by God Himself or by the general divine factor as expressed in the "elemental law," can never be ascertained by means of any experiment whatsoever—it rests solely and entirely upon the spiritual interpretation of the truth disclosed in religious experience. Faith, in other words, has primacy in the knowledge of God.

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This truth, that faith is supreme in religious knowledge, is the fundamental insight we have to respect when we would answer the question: How do we know God? We know Him through faith, and through faith alone. Faith is not a substitute, tentative and inferior, for a scientific knowledge of God. Faith is the very best, the

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only possible, the only legitimate, and the only desirable knowledge of God. **N**o improvement, no religious progress, no new experiences, no program of realism, no exactitude can ever convince that faith has been supplanted, that we have accomplished the task of knowing God directly, and of avoiding the circuitous way of prophetic imagination and figurative speech. This round-about course is the way God Himself has chosen to enlighten us concerning Himself, and concerning His will. The prophet is the divinely appointed investigator in the religious realm. The professor lacks the one necessary credential. How absurd to assume that the revelation experienced by Moses on Sinai or by Paul before Damascus could possibly be made sure or verified by the way of any scientific device! And experiences like these are the true sources of our knowledge of God. They are the classical "methods" by which this knowledge is conveyed, as experiment and calculation are the classical methods in the laboratory of sciences. While it is the special excellence of the scientific methods to attain the highest degree of exactitude and objectivity, it is the requirement of religious experience that all mental powers, intellectual and moral, emotional and imaginal, the totality of the human soul be engaged in it. In religious language this totality is traditionally called "spirit." The human spirit, knowing God, reflects and reveals the holy spirit of God. Accordingly we are commanded to worship "in spirit and in truth."

The religious spirit, as compared with the fractional intellect, is always concrete, never abstract, and depends on personal experience, embedded in the concrete con-

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ditions of life. These conditions cannot be artificially created as the conditions of an experiment can. A knowledge of God cannot be detached from the historical coherence and continuity of life. *History, not nature*, is the background of our community with God as our Lord; and our experience of Him determines the course of history. While knowledge of nature proceeds from abstract principles and isolated data, and goes on to conclusions, drawn out from these presuppositions with logical consistence, spiritual knowledge is initiated by awe toward the universal mystery of the real, guided by moral reason and moral experience, and supported by inspired imagination. How these elements collaborate in actual experience so that the knowledge of God emerges from their fusion, cannot be analyzed further. No logical process can grasp or dissect it. As God is a mystery, the knowledge of God also must remain mysterious, despite all our erudition. No genuinely religious man would wish to dispense with this unfathomable inwardness of the process through which we attain to the knowledge of God. The prophetic "method" cannot be studied and taught, applied or copied. When we disregard the peculiar differences of these types of knowledge, we do not succeed in discovering new truths. Rather, we shall destroy and nullify those truths already found and communicated by the holy documents. The prophet is more akin to the creative artist than he is to the scientist. Religious knowledge consequently is more akin to the wisdom of poetry or drama than to mathematical calculus.

Thus in religion experience and experiment do not coincide. Man experiences God, but God experiments

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with man. Faith is not the product of experiment, unless we broaden the term experiment to include obedience to the divine commandment. Political revolutions have been referred to as great experiments, and we might analogously speak of religious revolutions as experiments also. But this use of the word is metaphorical only. The figure does not imply that a political movement is identical with a laboratory experiment. Of course, an element of adventure, of risk, may be contained in all experiments whether scientific or political, and not less in religious experiments. But this element is modified in the respective fields by their peculiar structure.

What is an experiment? If it is an investigation deliberately planned and carried through by man for the purpose of finding out the nature and the order of relations or processes, then religion, even in the form of an experience of God, is certainly not experimental. It is the characteristic mark of revealed religion, that man experiences God as calling and commanding him, that man is the target of God's actions, and that man knows God by obeying Him, by devotion and adoration. Man does not deliberately act: he is acted upon. This basic attitude of man toward God excludes the possibility of an experiment as applied in physics or chemistry. A faith which cannot be confirmed except by the experimental experience of our "adjustment" is below the level of revealed religion, not above this level, as the panegyrist of modern religion would like to make us believe.

It may be objected to this conception of religious knowledge, that it has so little in common with knowledge in the usual, that is, scientific sense of the term

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as to make it advisable to abandon the word knowledge entirely in the religious sphere. I do not think that such a renouncement is imperative or even expedient. There are many rooms in the mansion of knowledge. As there are many different shades of objectivity and certainty in the realm of the sciences, and as it would be impertinent to demand that psychology or history should turn to mathematical equations, so it would be false to confine the term knowledge to the natural sciences alone. It is the prejudice of our time to overrate the value of scientific knowledge, as if no other knowledge could attain to any truth whatever. Yet who would deny that knowledge achieved by personal experience in practical professions is of value. There is a vast treasure of knowledge conveyed from generation to generation, never codified in exact formulae or verified by any science, but useful in life. Indeed, the realm of scientific knowledge is much smaller than most of us realize. The scope of this knowledge is confined to the sphere of perceived reality, and will ever be confined to this sphere alone, because the very nature of other spheres—say, political or juristic or aesthetic or religious life—exclude the principles and methods of this knowledge. It is a pure pedantry and a pseudo-scientific superstition to misuse the means of experimental knowledge in a futile quest for truth in fields which lie beyond the horizon of empirical science.

Even the greatest figure in the scientific world is not protected by his achievements there from misusing the tools of his professional work. Professor Einstein dispatched a contribution to the Conference for Science, Philosophy and Religion in 1940, in which he denied

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the personality of God on the basis of scientific inferences. If we grant the premises, we must accept his conclusions. But those premises assume that the physicist can retain his authority, even though he leaves his special field and enters the spiritual sphere, where God the Almighty summons His creatures to worship. He is confused in what God is and what God wills. And this is the fundamental error the physicist commits, if he as a physicist seeks to determine the nature of God. It is an error of point of view. He is to be blamed, not because he comes to wrong conclusions, but because he proceeds from wrong assumptions. These false assumptions move him to draw inferences far remote from the range of scientific truth. This is the characteristic failure of our century.

We have forgotten that scientific knowledge is a restricted realm, restricted not only because it is not yet closed and can never be closed, but because its methods necessarily restrict its range and consequently its results. It is self-evident that we cannot grasp any personality at all if we depend on the methods exercised in mathematics and physics. Though the physicist is himself a person, he is nevertheless unable to comprehend personality as long as he is nothing but a physicist. The prophet, not the physicist, however acute his arguments may be, is the true "expert" in the domain of the knowledge of God. The expression of Einstein's theological view is not without danger of misleading opinion, because the weight of his voice in the field in which he is an authority may persuade people to trust him even when he dares to trespass upon a field obviously beyond his hori-

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zon. What would Professor Einstein say if a prominent theologian applied his mode of thought to the solution of physical problems as did the medieval scholars? The proverb says: Shoemaker, stick to your last! It is difficult for physicists to acknowledge that they, too, are cobblers.

Were it possible, by scientific means, to find out God, would the discovery satisfy the human spirit? If God is an impersonal factor in the universe, why should we continue to chant psalms and to read epistles in honor of Him? If we possess exact methods which support us with an adequate way of knowing the divine, why should we still worship in the old solemn forms? To the experimental empirical theologian all nonintellectual elements in the quest for God should appear veils that obscure the full truth to be torn away as knowledge increases. At the best they are poetical embellishments without any essential significance or spiritual value. But to be sure, the empiricists scarcely proceed to the end of the road they admire so much.

If we sum up the considerations of this lecture we must come to the conclusion that no possible scientific substitute for the knowledge of God, granted by the prophet and the man of God, can ever succeed; nor is such a procedure in any way desirable to him who understands the true nature of religion and of the knowledge of God. "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather *are known of God*, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Gal. 4, 8 ff.



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## LECTURE III

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### RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

#### A. THE SUPREME BEING AND THE BIBLICAL GOD

By faith and by faith alone do we know God, not by the empirical method of the sciences. We know Him within the concrete context of His revelation, not by abstract and theoretical inference. As persons we know Him, not as possessors of the intellect only. We know Him as being a mystery, and therefore unfathomable. We perceive Him not with physical eyes, but with the eye of conscience, with the heart, with the imagination. We meet Him in obeying His commandments and respecting His holy will, or through sin and repentance. We know Him in adoring His inconceivable majesty and glory. We know Him in fearing and loving Him. In short, we know Him in a religious manner.

But is there not also a metaphysical kind of knowledge of the Supreme Being? Has the old rational or natural theology no legitimate place at all in our scheme of theology? Are the refutations of the proofs of the existence of God as developed by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* finally valid? Have they destroyed for all time any attempt at a metaphysical knowledge of God? Kant, we agree, was right in rejecting all concep-

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tions of God based on scientific knowledge, and in repudiating all forms of a naturalistic theology. But the so-called natural theology was not in all its versions a naturalistic doctrine. On the contrary, it was both originally in Aristotle and in its scholastic constructions a metaphysical theory comprehending God not as a physical factor, but as the spiritual cause of the Universe, and as the supreme end of the world and of man. Is this metaphysical theology as well overthrown by Kant's attack upon it? I have shown that no experimental, no scientific, no empirical theology can avail us in our search for God. I have shown this by contrasting a genuinely religious with a pseudo-scientific conception of God. But I have not yet dealt with the claims of the strictly rational or metaphysical theology which figured both as a rival or as an ally of revealed theology during the entire history of Christian thought.

In advance I should like to state my view concerning the value of this philosophical science of God. It is infinitely deeper and richer in insight than any of the types of empirical theology which I have presented and, I hope, disposed of. Natural theology is a respectable discipline, respectable not only because of its venerable age and its glorious history, but also because of the religious spirit which has animated most of its exponents. The concept and definitions of God as decreed by the modern Experimentalists and Empiricists appear as unreal, superficial shades, compared with the theological systems of the great line of metaphysicians from ancient times to Hegel. But this vast company of thinkers have not achieved what alone can be achieved by religious ex-

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perience, interpreted by inspired imagination. By its very nature, conceptual notions are inadequate to express a knowledge of God which is first-hand and genuine. Metaphysical doctrines may be constructed on the foundation of revelation, as the doctrines of Christian thinkers in the Middle Ages certainly were; but even these thinkers transformed the knowledge of faith into a knowledge of rational thought—they transformed the biblical image of the living God into a conceptual notion or a logical idea, and in doing so they abandoned the original basis of religious knowledge. Were they justified in performing such a transforming? Is God as conceived by speculative reason still the inconceivable God of revelation? Or is there a gap between them never to be filled by means of metaphysical thought?

The distinction between God as conceived by philosophy and God as presented by revelation is fundamental. Since this distinction concerns the relation between logical thought and spiritual reality, concept and being, philosophy and religion, it is of the greatest import. It introduces the central problem of ontology and epistemology. No wonder, then, that Kant mobilized all the philosophical powers of the human mind in order to clarify the difficulties involved in this situation. No wonder, also, that despite the lucidity and scope of his achievement the problem itself remained obscure, and the energy of his successors was directed to reaching new solutions. Kant's criticism seemed to have annihilated natural theology. But behold, it survived, not only in the camp of the religious opponents who adhered to the school of

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Thomas Aquinas, but even amongst the most ardent and most enlightened disciples of Kant himself.

Natural theology survived his blows, and it was even more vigorously and vehemently proclaimed than ever before! Hegel renewed not only the authority and the claims of the dethroned queen of the sciences; he went even so far as to declare that philosophy itself is nothing else than the only adequate knowledge of God, that God and He alone is the sole object worthy of philosophical studies, and that metaphysical theology more than any other kind of theology penetrates to the very center of the deity. Although this boast was strongly contested by all religious theologians, the attempt has never been abandoned to reconcile revelation and reason by means of reason, and to depict revealed truth in terms of logical thought.

To be sure, most modern exponents of a natural theology are no longer as pretentious as Hegel. They do not claim to establish a science superior in rank and results to the knowledge of God afforded by the Bible. But they do claim to be able to demonstrate by merely intellectual means the essential truth of biblical revelation, and to confirm it by reason. They propose to attain a knowledge of God fully in agreement with the knowledge contained in, and based on, faith. They formulate a rational theology, even if the word rational, as used by them, may exclude a rationalism of the old pre-Kantian type, and leave room for experience and inferences derived from experience. These theologians defend a theistic philosophy which would be in complete agreement with the theology of the Christian religion,

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though lacking the richness and concrete character of the latter. They fully trust that the human intellect using its mundane knowledge can and must come to ultimate conclusions consonant with the biblical conceptions of God. In other words, the modern philosophic theologians disregard the warning of Kant; they do not share in his criticism of "pure reason" and in his rejection of all rational theology.

I am convinced that these theistic thinkers underrate the difficulties of the task they undertake. The first and the gravest difficulty arises when we ask if God as the content of philosophic thought and God as the holy figure of the Bible can be assumed to be the same being; in other words, whether or not philosophical thought is entitled to call a certain idea at which it may arrive, "idea of God." Even the most superficial thinker must admit that such an idea, no matter how solid the ground on which the rational theology is erected, is doomed to remain infinitely more remote from God than is the inspired vision of seer or prophet. No metaphysician dares to refer to God with the intimate feeling characterizing the utterances of Jesus. The philosophic concept by its very nature is abstract, impersonal, and dry, as compared with the personal, concrete, and passionate comprehension of God encountered in all biblical writings. Does it not verge on blasphemy to speak of the heavenly father of Jesus in terms of philosophic considerations based on a logical procedure? Indeed, it seems extremely improbable that we should be able to reduce the awful mystery of the Holy One to a logical concept, no matter how profound and how subtle this concept

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may be; to grasp the personal reality of God by the impersonal means of philosophical demonstration.

In other words: the identity of the meaning of the term "God" as used in philosophical discussions and as used in the religious language cannot be assumed from the outset. On the contrary, there are cogent arguments for disputing this identity, and there is no possibility of refuting them since they concern the very principle occasioning the dispute. If we use the word "God" in philosophical reflections, we are bound to determine it without reference to the biblical character of God. Otherwise we are in danger of taking for granted, in our reflections, certain elements of knowledge which are by no means legitimate. Unconsciously we substitute the holy image for the pure concept and vice versa. Even Kant did not escape this fallacy in his teaching that pure practical reason can postulate the idea of God the Creator, although Kant has the great merit of discerning sharply between what theoretical reason can demonstrate and what religion contributes to the knowledge of God. It is by this acute distinction that Kant assailed the dogmatic confidence in the power of speculation to found a rational theology.

Although Kant denies the possibility of proving the existence of God—of the living God, that is, whom we know from the Old and the New Testament—he was fully aware that metaphysical thought entails a certain idea of being conformable to God. The whole of reality is the incentive that urges the thinking mind to fashion this ultimate idea. But thought, Kant insisted, cannot attain to the demonstration of the existence of this being.

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Thought must remain imprisoned within its confines. It cannot transcend its own realm without confronting the abyss separating the sphere of ideas from the sphere of reality. In the case of sense experience, this abyss is filled or bridged by perception or sensation. But there is no sense intuition in the case of the knowledge of God. God is invisible. I think Kant is perfectly in agreement with common sense in this respect. We cannot perceive God as we perceive things around us. We cannot perceive God even as we can perceive ourselves, for this perception too is dependent on sense perception, and occurs in a way coherent with our consciousness of spatial and temporal order. God, as He appears in biblical revelation, though He enters space and time, is nevertheless beyond the limit of the entire world of sense, and beyond the possibilities of our experience of this world. He cannot be perceived by means of sense perception, nor can He be conceived by means of the intellectual forms applied in sense perception, such as causation, substance, and attribute.

The whole of reality is a necessary idea, indeed it is the supreme idea of theoretical reason, the ideal of this reason, as Kant calls it. But reason cannot conceive the object of this idea. The idea is a mere ideal; it contains no real knowledge. It is a scheme of a knowledge unattainable by our intellect. Reason is compelled to abdicate when it reaches the highest summit of its theoretical ascent. The summit of knowledge—that is, God—is a distant mountain that towers before our landscape, but cannot be climbed.

One does not need to be a learned scholar or a pro-

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found metaphysician to envisage the problem of the whole of reality. Every human being has a consciousness of this totality, however undeveloped and vague it may be, and however unable man may be to render this consciousness articulate. Man is man because of his being related to ultimate reality. If we call this relation metaphysical, we must conclude that *man as man is a metaphysical being*. Metaphysics as science is a rare matter (even amongst so-called philosophers). It presupposes a special gift and a painstaking, scrupulous erudition on the part of one who will acquire or augment it. But metaphysics as a predisposition is a natural faculty of every man. This faculty is the root of all natural and supernatural knowledge of God. Metaphysics and religion are connected with each other, humanly speaking, by this predisposition. But in spite of this common germ, the ways it is developed are contrary to each other. Metaphysics sets out from man's experience of the *world* and of *himself* and proceeds to the utmost limit of this knowledge: there it encounters the idea of the whole of reality. Religion sets out from the experience of *God* and proceeds to the knowledge of world and human kind as creatures and dependents of the divine.

From the standpoint of pure knowledge the way of philosophical thought is more satisfying. This way pursues the ideal of an autonomous and self-sufficient knowledge. Religious knowledge, on the other hand, is a means to an end. That end is salvation, redemption, reconciliation with God. Religious knowledge of God, however, may be more adequate, if God is no proper object of pure knowledge, and if the personal element



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introduced by the religious quest for salvation is a necessary precondition of the only possible knowledge of God. But a certain affinity between the philosophical idea of the supreme being and the religious idea of God certainly exists despite this conflict. Those theologians who rigorously deny that philosophy can approach an idea akin to that of God forget that the biblical picture of the Supreme Being, though it represents a living, concrete personality, and therefore presupposes and demands a personal intercourse for thorough acquaintance, nevertheless permits no doubt as to His universality. He is not the sort of person a human being is. He suffers not the restrictions of individual men. He is superior to any limitation whatsoever, and therefore to any particularity and individuality. And this universal meaning, this all-comprising capacity of the Supreme Being seems to bring Him within the compass of universals, ideas, and concepts. This is the reason why the realm of the Platonic Ideas seems ever to arouse a quasi-religious reverence, and why Christian theologians of many periods have felt attracted by Plato, and tempted to unify his Idea of the Good and the biblical idea of God. However the relation between Plato's doctrine and the biblical presentation may be regarded and interpreted, one thing is certain: the biblical God is as universal, as eternal, as supreme, and as commanding as the Platonic Idea of the Good is.

The biblical God is not the god of a tribe or of a single nation, though He be the King of the chosen people; He is the Creator of the world and of all men, the Ruler over all nations, the supreme Judge of all mankind. And this quasi-philosophical idea is widened, deepened, and

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emphasized in the New Testament. Therefore a certain kinship between this biblical conception and the metaphysical concept of a supreme Idea or an absolute Being cannot be denied. Philosophical thought, clearly if the Bible be right, must of necessity be driven to a point where it has to deal with the problem of ultimate reality.

Although it must be admitted that thought alone can never exhaust the knowledge of God as a living personality, nay, never approach Him as a personality at all, nevertheless the supreme and ultimate principle of reality has a close relation to the biblical image of the living God. No matter how justified dogmatic theologians may be in claiming a special prerogative with respect to the knowledge of God, they are surely wrong if they go so far as to reject the possibility of a philosophical approach to the concept of the Supreme Being or of the Absolute. No matter how problematic and restricted the knowledge of the Absolute may be, philosophy cannot help requiring this knowledge as the ultimate truth towards which it constantly tends. This is the ultimate point whereupon philosophy and religion, man's thought and God's revelation, converge. "It is," says Clement Webb, "to that which stands for the Absolute that in the end the greatest reverence must be paid, nor can the religious consciousness forbear the demand that the supreme God should be the supreme Reality, the Absolute and nothing else."<sup>1</sup> God, as the Bible reveals Him, represents, though in an imaginative form, ultimate truth and ultimate reality. "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *God and Personality*, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Col. 1, 17.

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The Absolute of metaphysics, the supreme principle, however it may be conceived—as Being or as ultimate reality, as the idea of the Good or as absolute idea, as the Prime Mover of the World or as the absolute Spirit—represents the religious God in philosophic style. In turn the biblical God as the Creator of the world, the supreme Will, the source of grace, incarnates the Absolute of metaphysics in a religious form. Yet this statement has to be qualified further. We are not entitled to assert a perfect identity between the Supreme Being of metaphysics and the living God, for there is also a difference between them. This difference is deep and fundamental enough to arouse doubts as to whether there is any measure of identity at all between them. More precisely: we do not know whether or not the metaphysical and the religious conception deal with the same being, because we do not know this being in any other, in any third way which would be more adequate, more intimate, and less restricted than the metaphysical notion and the religious image. There is no outside criterion. There is no third, no superior mode of knowing which would enable us to compare the two we have described, and to state that they approach the same Being from different sides, from the side of human intellectual thought and from the side of divine revelation.

Instead of asserting an identity which I cannot confirm by means of logical conclusions, therefore I avail myself of a parable. Two separate groups of men are at work on opposite sides of a mountain constructing a tunnel to be cut through the rock. They have bored a good deal of their respective tracts, but they have not yet reached the

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point where they will meet each other when the work is finished. Each band of workers already hears the sounds from the party on the other side. But they are still separated so that they cannot see their common goal. God can be likened to the prospective meeting spot. But the group of philosophers on the one side and that of the prophets on the other side are not quite in the same position as our workers in the parable. These toilers in the tunnel can hope and do hope that they will meet each other eventually, whereas the thinkers—if they understand their task clearly and avoid rationalistic illusions—know that they can never break through the barrier separating them from the prophets across the mountain. Even if thought could fully elucidate what the concept of the Absolute implies, it would still remain a concept and nothing more, lacking the vitality, the life, the reality of God.

### B. THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN DOGMATICS AND METAPHYSICS

Thus a continuous struggle persists between the two sides in the quest for God as to which is superior. Each pretends to be more legitimate, more adequate, truer than the other. From the standpoint of metaphysics the religious image of God appears to be a human embodiment of the supreme principle; an anthropomorphic and therefore degraded substitute for the only true notion developed by logical methods and corroborated by a metaphysical system. The prophet seems to give an imaginative idolization of the pure conceptual idea, perhaps poetical and persuasive, meeting the needs of the human heart,

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but wanting the sober accuracy of a definition. This is the standpoint not only of speculative metaphysicians like Aristotle and Hegel—to mention the greatest only—who presume to have given the completely adequate and satisfying knowledge of the supreme Being, but also of critical thinkers like Hume and Kant.

From this point of view all religious conceptions are of a secondary value only—if of any value at all. They originate in the more or less arbitrary and contingent imagination of particular nations or persons, and therefore they are at best nothing but a pleasing diversion of man's fancy, or the representation of the truth in a mythical form adapted to the capacity of the masses who are not able to grasp the truth by means of logical thought—the truth unveiled. A modern exponent of this school, Benedetto Croce, does not concede as much as this. He holds that religion has no longer any value whatsoever, that it has been superseded completely by philosophy. According to the metaphysics of Bradley, the living God of the Bible is an appearance in the human consciousness only. Philosophy alone attains to a knowledge of God as reality; philosophy alone is “in earnest” when it finds out the essence of the Absolute.

From the standpoint of dogmatics, on the contrary, metaphysics yields strictly human concepts only, the fruits of the intellect of fallen man who has no right to boast of having reached the truth divine. All attempts at expressing the divine mystery by means of logical conclusion and methodical inferences, therefore, are necessarily doomed to failure. God is infinitely superior to man's intellect and unfathomable by man's logic. The only pos-

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sible way of constructing a rational knowledge of God is the dogmatic way of systematizing God's own word revealing Himself. The philosophical thinker has no right at all to assert that his supreme principle represents the living God in a final fashion: a careful study of Scripture alone can accomplish this difficult task. The god of the metaphysician, however lofty his concept be, is an idol; he is not the almighty Lord to whom the Christian prays. Even Plato's Idea of the Good, Karl Barth insists, is an idol, a product of human thought, a hypothesis, but not the Eternal and Holy God. If we want to conceive of God in logical terms we must turn to dogmatics, which expound the revelation God has made of Himself; we must learn from God Himself that He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. No metaphysician whatsoever can interpret this trinity or can substitute dialectical concepts for it.

The conflict between these opposite attitudes and approaches is complete, and there seems to be in sight no possibility of any reconciliation. Indeed, so long as the opponents keep their respective positions, any accord between them is absolutely excluded. The struggle is doomed to be permanent, and no neutral arbiter will ever bring them to terms. But there is a superior insight, I think, which shows that these two extreme positions are each wrong. Both overrate and overstate the truth within their possession. There is truth on both sides, but neither side can claim to be its sole custodian. There are deficiencies on both sides, peculiar to each of them, and implied in the very foundations on which, respectively, they stand.

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The dogmatic theologian should admit that religious or spiritual comprehension, though based upon God's own Word, is not without certain limits, which forbid every definite statement about the impossibility of an approach to the knowledge of the Supreme Being on the part of man's own intellect. Though God reveals Himself, nevertheless He also veils Himself. The Bible teaches that man is fallen; but the Bible also teaches that, by the Fall, man has become "as one of us," knowing good and evil. Man's intellect and knowledge seems not to have been impaired, but rather extended by the original sin. Why should not the attempt, undertaken by man to achieve a knowledge of the Supreme Being, on the ground of his experience and with the mental instrument bestowed on him by God, lead to certain sound results, though these results may be insufficient and to a certain degree obscure? To be sure, thought can never reach the level of a personal intimacy, and therefore it cannot supersede the holy images given us by inspired prophets. But since revelation admittedly is restricted by our present capacity to appreciate its meaning, why should not thought be successful in marching toward the goal of a purely "secular," rational, philosophical theology? What we call God's personality is in any case so much superior to our own that even the term person is not to be taken as literally true. According to Scripture, we see God in a glass only, we do not see Him face to face; we see Him in an image, not as He is in Himself. God is and remains a mystery in spite of the knowledge we receive from Him through His Word. The dogmatic theologian, therefore, should not deprive the metaphysi-

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cian of his right to approach this mystery through his own efforts.

The metaphysician, on the other hand, is required to admit that there is a limit to conceptual cognition of the Infinite Spirit. Hegel was, as far as I can see, the only thinker who dared to deny this limit in principle, and to maintain that the idea of God, as expounded in his system, is not to be distinguished from God Himself; that, in other words, the idea and the reality of God are one and the same. All other metaphysicians, even those who pretend to possess an adequate knowledge of the nature of the deity, for example: Aristotle and Spinoza, restrict this knowledge in one way or the other, teaching that God alone knows the full truth, while man must suffer limitation in some respect. They hold that there is a gulf between the philosophical notion and the reality of God, a gulf never to be overcome by means of logical or metaphysical insight.

Aristotle pointed out that the god knowing himself knows everything, whereas man is under the necessity of distinguishing between the god and the world, for man's intellect is always in a state of actualizing its potentialities, while the divine intellect is in a state of eternal actuality; man strives after the goal of omniscience, while the god is always at the goal. Spinoza taught that God has infinite attributes; man can only attain to the knowledge of two of them; the divine substance is in itself, man is in the substance. Hegel alone claimed to embrace the whole of reality in his system. But precisely this system shows better than any other that the task it pretends to have accomplished is defi-



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nitely insoluble.<sup>3</sup> In the preface to his last book, *The Philosophy of Right*, he frankly acknowledged the truth that there is a cleavage between thought and life, the abstract concept and the concrete reality, never completely to be effaced. In fact, the whole system of Hegel confirms this final confession, for the whole system exhibits with a painstaking accuracy all the antimonies which bar the way to the final truth.

It is the epochal achievement of the philosophy of Kant to have originated this insight. Kant has emphasized that philosophic thought ends in the idea of an intellect that differs from ours in that it does not need outer sense data to become effective; an intellect that produces its own content, and that therefore is called by him "intuitive." This idea of God is akin to the Aristotelian conception. But Kant stresses more vigorously the fact that man cannot fully understand the nature of the infinite creativity and actuality of the divine intellect. We can form the idea of this intellect, but we cannot fill this scheme with a real content. It represents a problem or a project of our restricted, finite reason. We have no empirical experience of the divine intellect, and we cannot supply our abstract idea with a concrete datum. The idea indicates the direction in which the truth has to be sought, but it does not convey the truth itself.

The final conclusion of our reflections on the peculiar nature and the divergence of religious and philosophical

<sup>3</sup> Cf. my article: "God, Nation and Individual in the Philosophy of Hegel," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, December, 1941.

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types of knowledge is this, that neither of them comes to full completion and perfection. Both are doomed to remain fragmentary, each needs a complement. Their integration is called for. It is precisely this lack of completion, this deficiency of both, that enables us to reconcile them with each other, and to require the possibility of a standpoint on which they converge. Were revealed knowledge of God boundless, did God teach us the truth without any withholding, this reconciliation and integration would be as impossible as it would be if philosophy on its side were able to reach a final objective. In each case, no place would and could be reserved for the competitor. If God revealed Himself unrestrictedly, He would no longer be a mystery; but this conclusion betrays the absurdity of the assumption. For if He ceases to be a mystery, religion could no longer fulfill its function and its meaning. It would merge with philosophy, as Signor Croce demands. Religious knowledge would lose its peculiar existence.<sup>4</sup> And metaphysical speculation would consummate its ambition to replace religion and to become religion itself.

Some metaphysicians, like the Neoplatonists or Spinoza, have indeed believed that their systems had reached this goal; philosophy became their religion. But, save for a few, there is little likelihood of this error, and its rarity corroborates the thesis that both philosophic and religious knowledge are bound to be restricted, however abundant they be, and that this inevitable limitation, far from being an evil or a source of complaint, reconciles them

<sup>4</sup> Cf. my essay on "Croce and Hegel" in *The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce* (The Library of Living Philosophers).

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with each other. What falls short of perfection of knowledge in each realm permits and sanctions the knowledge achieved in the other. Such variety and competition between the philosopher and the theologian enriches the sum total of knowledge of God to man.

In the struggle between metaphysical and religious theology each side is right and each side is wrong. Each is right in maintaining the legitimacy and indispensability of its prerogatives; each is wrong in disputing the authority and domain of the other. On the one hand, philosophical knowledge is not justified in asserting that the living God is a human substitute for the Absolute as conceived by metaphysics; on the other hand, religion is unwise in denying the truth of metaphysical speculation within its legitimate field. God, as revealed by the prophets, adumbrates infinities beyond the divine revelation. Not even the Gospel reveals Him in His fullness and totality. The concept of an intellect far superior to ours—the Absolute Spirit—suggests something beyond the whole conceptual sphere, as man meditates upon it, something that no concept of ours can express.

It is this "something" that I had in mind when I availed myself of the parable of the tunnel workers. So long as they have not finished their work, there is always an area beyond the point where they are working. Only if they could meet each other would they no longer have to face any "beyond." But then they would no longer be working, the divergence of the directions in which they work would cease to exist. There would no longer be religious knowledge regarded as distinct from philosophical, no longer philosophical regarded as distinct

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from religious knowledge; neither of them would any longer exist apart from the other. But in that far-off event there would no longer be any separation of man from God. There would no longer be Man as the ever imperfect being; God would be, as Paul says and as Origen liked to repeat, all in all.

In the meantime, therefore, a certain tension is immanent within the duality, not to be relieved without obliterating the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge and of their sources. No issue is possible but the maintenance of the duality based on the insight that the opposite dimensions of labor do not clash with the legitimate aims and ends of the opposite party. This reconciliation should not be misunderstood and misinterpreted as if it meant that philosophic knowledge could be fitted into religious knowledge, or vice versa, in such a way that both together would give us the whole truth; or that each of them would supply the deficiency of the other. What falls short in revealed comprehension of God, God alone, not philosophy, can grant us. And what is missing in our concept of the Absolute, religion cannot provide in the specific form of philosophic knowledge. In this case, therefore, the question whether a "Christian philosophy" exists has to be denied.

But there is indeed a difference between these two kinds of deficiency. Whereas revealed knowledge of God is granted us by God Himself through the mediation of prophetic inspiration and through the experience of events recorded in the Bible, metaphysical knowledge of the Absolute is not revealed by the Absolute (although

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Hegel suggests such a conception). It is produced by the labor and struggle of the thought of man. God's power of self-revelation is not known to us and we cannot set bounds to the ability of God in this respect. Compared with our own power of knowledge, God's power is infinite. To be sure, God only reveals what man is able to comprehend. But since His Spirit transcends the resources of the human understanding, we cannot ascertain the limit of His self-revelation. On the other hand, we can ascertain the limit of our own intellectual power and of metaphysical knowledge as achieved or achievable by us, at least in principle. Our mind and intellect are finite. We can acknowledge that there is a definite limit to the concept. This limit is determined by the very nature of the concept as a general or universal idea which is always opposed to the particular and individual real. No philosophical theology can ever transcend this boundary. The concept of the Absolute must remain separated from the Real itself. The concept of the Absolute is condemned to remain abstract for all times, for all purposes. It cannot transmute itself into the concrete and real, as Hegel supposes and strives to demonstrate. There is a gulf between the abstract and the concrete, never to be bridged.

The Absolute cannot *exist* in the abstract form in which it is conceived as the Absolute. Philosophy ends in a problem that by its very nature defies all possibilities of a philosophic solution. This is the reason why Plato invariably turned to the mythos when his speculation reached an ultimate limit. But there is a legitimate treasury of knowledge lacking in theology: revelation. Re-

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ligious knowledge of God, akin to the mythical element in Plato, provides what the conceptual knowledge can never contain. It supplies the knowledge of the Absolute as a real being, namely of God. While speculation is confined to the sphere of the *universal*, religious knowledge, on the contrary, is knowledge of the *real*. Religious knowledge resolves therefore a problem insoluble within the confines of philosophical thought. But of course it does not solve it by means of philosophical thought, as some Christian Platonists suggested; Christian faith and Christian knowledge of God do not involve or proclaim a Christian philosophy. Rather, God by His revelation performs an integration that man cannot achieve: the deficiency of philosophy is thus overcome by prophetic insight. Religious knowledge does not suffer from the same deficiency. To be sure, it too does not reach God as He is in Himself. It also is restricted. But nevertheless, it approaches the real, the living God more nearly. *He reaches us* by inspiring our spirit. God and the human mind meet in the moment of inspiration. God Himself, not only an idea or a concept of Him, confronts the prophet. And He shows His face to those of simple souls raised to Him in prayer.

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## LECTURE IV

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### DOUBT AND CERTAINTY IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

#### A. SPECULATIVE EXPERIENCE

HAVING now discussed the relation between knowledge and faith, and that between natural theology—both scientific and metaphysical—and the religious knowledge of God, I shall go on to raise the epistemological question concerning the source and the criterion of this knowledge. Have we a direct contact, akin to perception, with the object of this divine knowledge? Are we justified in agreeing with the realists who maintain that we know God as He really is outside our consciousness? How can we find out whether or not our idea of God is a true idea, if we accept the idealistic view?

But is not the answer to these questions already implied in, and determined by, the stand we have taken? If the knowledge of God is spiritual and personal, not rational and objective, if it is embedded in life and the historical stream of revelation, if it is imaginative and emotional, how could it be regarded as a realistic experience, based on empirical insight to be interpreted by a realistic epistemology? Are we not rather compelled by the foregoing arguments to conclude that such an idea of God as we can attain is nothing but our own

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idea, existing in our own consciousness alone, and that we have no access to a reality beyond it? On the other hand, how can we claim any certainty at all in the knowledge of God if we admit that the holy image presented in Scripture is an *image* only, that is, an *idea* in our imagination? How can we believe in the verity of this image, if we are not able to compare it with the *real* Being represented by it? This is the crucial problem of all epistemological theories which do not start from the realistic certainty of our immediate perception. It is the difficulty of all epistemological "idealism." To be sure, in the case of scientific knowledge, we may have recourse to instruments of examination; we can experiment with the object of our investigation and we can compare the result of our logical procedure with the result of our experiments. This is the reason why the experimentalists in theology emulate the methods of the natural sciences and stick to a realistic epistemology. If this way is barred, as it is barred in our search for God, what other corroborations can be secured?

The question is serious. It is even more serious than it would be in the field of perception and natural knowledge. For the truth or falsity of our knowledge of God concerns more than the temporal welfare of earthly life. It has to do with the soul. It concerns more than the technical means of providing the necessities of existence. It concerns the meaning of existence, the very essence of human happiness. The question whether or not a just and merciful God has created the world and rules over history and over our private life cannot be answered by scientific experience or by metaphysical speculation.



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It cannot be answered by any kind of intellectual knowledge. Nevertheless, it is the most important and the most pertinent of all questions we can ever raise. Many experiences and many reasons may be adduced to lend credence to an affirmative answer. But an equal number of experiences and reasons may be adduced in support of a negative answer.

The Bible assures us of God's infinite goodness. But the Bible offers no methodical proofs in the rational sense, proofs which could withstand scientific doubt. The concepts involved in the image of a personal God, of His justice and kindness, of His creative power, of the world as His creation, of history as determined by His will, all these concepts are no concepts at all, if we take this term in its strict sense, demanding notions defined and controlled by logical procedure. These concepts are imaginative, used in biblical narratives and commandments and prophetic addresses which were not intended to teach a doctrinal or theoretical truth. The images do not have a strictly defined meaning. On the contrary, they have a meaning more or less oscillating between widely distant poles, varying in the various documents, developing in revelation as it proceeds from the beginnings of time up to the synoptic gospels and finally to the comparatively doctrinal and philosophical teaching of Paul and to the Gospel of St. John. Those images are akin to life and related to the ever-changing spirit of history. The images themselves are alive and therefore not determined and fixed. We do not regard this character of vitality as a defect in them; on the contrary, we feel it to be the source of their strength and a guarantee

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of their inner truth. All this shows how different the knowledge of God is from the knowledge of objects based on perception and observation, verified by experiment and expressed in theories, theses and definitions; how different also from philosophical knowledge, based on logical conclusions.

It is obvious that we have to abandon the standard and the criterion of science, that is, of rational or logical knowledge, whether it be empirical or speculative, experimental or deductive, if we are to understand the particular mode of religious knowledge, its kind of truth, its kind of certainty. But this does not mean that philosophy is unable to conceive the necessity and the function of this particular form of cognition and of this particular grade of certainty. On the contrary, I venture to maintain that philosophy can *strictly demonstrate* the need of this particular mode of knowledge on the ground of the peculiar task which it performs. This task, after all, is not arbitrarily manufactured; it is a necessary task, originating in the structure of the truth itself. And this task demands precisely the solution proposed by revealed knowledge.

If philosophy can show this necessity, it may not heighten the degree of certainty, to be achieved by this knowledge; it may not even ascertain the validity claimed by those who believe in its truth. But it makes these claims conceivable and thus throws a new light upon them. This implies an indirect sort of justification, which is all that reason can expect, provided the rational faculty understands itself and the nature of religious knowledge. Any other kind of justification or validation, as we

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shall now see, would violate the peculiar conditions of this knowledge and the peculiar character of its object.

We must begin with the fact that objective knowledge, that is, empirical scientific knowledge based on sense perception and logical methods, however well adapted to its special place in the scheme of things, is not to be extended beyond the boundaries of the realm in which it reigns. I alluded to these boundaries when I criticized the attempt to develop a theology imitating the principles of empirical scientific knowledge. Such an attempt is doomed to failure, because it disregards the restriction essential to this mode of knowledge; because it applies the same methods to knowing an object that by its very nature transcends the boundaries of the world of sense and of intellectual comprehension altogether. It is hardly necessary, therefore, to prove once more that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of nature do not pertain to the same sphere. Empirical scientific knowledge is restricted in that it applies to the objects of sense perception only. This restriction excludes from the realm of empirical reality not only the realm of ontological forms or of the intellectual categories essential to objective knowledge and therefore presupposed by it, but also the Whole of reality. Neither the categories of objective knowledge, the universals of scientific thought, nor the Whole of reality, the Absolute can ever be experienced in an empirical or realistic way. But there is an important difference between those categories or universals on the one hand, and the Absolute on the other, if related to religious knowledge. This knowledge is not at all interested in the system or in the nature of the universals,

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but it is interested highly in the essence of the Absolute, since faith furnishes us with a knowledge that concerns this essence, though revelation, the form of this knowledge, is not the form of logical speculation, and though it is God and not the Absolute that is known.

This peculiar quality of the knowledge of God requires peculiar inquiries. We know God by a certain kind of experience, though the idea of ultimate reality or of the Absolute is the object not of any possible experience, but rather of philosophical speculation. Religious or spiritual knowledge is paradoxical in that it combines two seemingly incompatible elements: *experience* and *speculation*. It represents a strange sort of experience: the experience of the object of speculation! The object of speculation can by its very nature not be experienced; nevertheless, religious experience is the experience of this object. No wonder that this experience is different from any other experience; it is no experience at all when we take the term in its usual sense, as contact with something that exists or happens in the empirical world. No wonder that this strange sort of experience has strange characteristics!

We should call religious experience a *speculative experience*, that is, an experience that contributes to speculation at the same time. No wonder also that philosophers have striven in vain to disclose the character of this paradoxical phenomenon, that they never could and can agree on how to describe the true nature of religious knowledge. No wonder, finally, that two opposite forms of natural theology—the old speculative or metaphysical form and the modern empirical or physical form—have been invented to solve the problem of the knowledge of

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God by substituting scientific or logical for religious or spiritual forms of knowledge. It is no less clear why these theological systems could not reach their goal. For they *separated* what is *united* in religious knowledge, they killed the living soul by severing it into two dead halves. The peculiar power and light of religious knowledge originates precisely in the fact that those halves are not separated, but rather permeate each other in a unique fashion, exactly adapted to the objective counterpart of the divine.

Religious or spiritual experience is not empirical, but speculative. Yet even though speculative, it is not rational or metaphysical. The knowledge of God is *neither empirical nor metaphysical*, but it *combines and fuses elements of both* these opposite species of knowledge. It is *quasi-empirical* and *quasi-speculative* or *quasi-metaphysical*, but it deviates as well from empirical as from metaphysical knowledge in that it is not logical knowledge at all. It is not logical because it is personal and embedded in the flux of life and movement. It is as little logical as the personal life experiences of the individual man are logical. Those experiences contain certain logical elements, it is true. But life as a whole cannot be subjected to a logical method, a logical principle, a logical thesis or series of propositions, a logical system. This is the reason why the knowledge of God is granted in historical or pseudo-historical narratives, in moral codes, in lyrics and songs, in epistles, that is, in the uttered expression of the living experience by individual persons. Never was this vision of God presented in the doctrinal form of a theology, nor is such a lack of structure in

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the knowledge of God to be condemned as a defect. On the contrary, it is the special excellence of this sort of knowledge, an excellence that surpasses the qualities of a logical or systematized method. For it secures and preserves the *personal contact* between man who knows and God who is known, as well as between God who knows and man who is known—a contact or communion indispensable to knowledge of God.

The reason why this contact is indispensable is to be sought in the special character of religious experience as the paradoxical *experience* of the object of *metaphysical speculation*. At first sight it seems to be absurd that just the object of speculation should allow a personal contact, since this object belongs to the sphere of impersonal or superpersonal truth. Is not the content of all personal experience confined to the person who enjoys it? Is it not by its very definition a subjective, individual impression or opinion that lacks all truth, all validity? If this were so, we would not be justified in speaking of personal experiences at all. The very meaning of experience forbids such a restriction. There is truth in our personal acquaintance of things and other persons, of life and the world. We really *know* our friends, our relatives, our country, our era, though this knowledge is colored and determined by our individual capacity and by our individual place or situation. There is *truth* in our experiences, no matter how vague, how confused, how narrow they may be. And all new experience, all intercourse with other persons, all development of personal conceptions only deepen their meaning without detracting from their personal character. All this is even more important if

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there is a *personal* experience of the object of *speculation*. For this object is by its very nature the same in the experiences of all persons, so that they can exchange their records of it, compare its content, one with another, examine what they have experienced by mutual communication, and thus authenticate the truth through centuries of intercourse and scrutiny. The result could never be *impersonal* knowledge, it would always be based on personal experience. It would be a kind of *interpersonal* knowledge, a knowledge brought forth by a community of persons who are engaged in steady communication, conversation, examination to preserve and to renew and to clarify the truth of their experiences.

Such is the impressive character of spiritual knowledge and the guarantee of its certainty. This knowledge is at once personal and interpersonal, individual and universal. It is individual with respect to its origin, it is universal with respect to its content. In this way it is quasi-empirical and quasi-metaphysical. There is a metaphysical element in the religious images of God, but this element is not isolated as it is in philosophic speculation. It is rather inseparably connected with its individual, personal form, interwoven in the context of the living experience of the community. Scientific knowledge, though empirical, is nevertheless inescapably abstract and general; it is a knowledge of principles, laws, generic schemes, quantitative equations; and accordingly, the knower exercises general faculties of mind. No one, as scientist, is an individual person. Only the *universal*, all-embracing object of speculation permits an *individual* knowledge; for despite its universality, this object is at the same time

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individual. It is not a law, not a principle, not a generic scheme, but rather *the real* in its totality, including the whole individuality of all knowing subjects and of all objects known. Precisely because religious knowledge is not only scientific, that is, general or speculative, but also based on individual experience, using the riches and concreteness of this experience, can it surpass scientific experience and metaphysical speculation. It fuses universality and individuality as it fuses the speculative and the empirical character of cognition.

### B. RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

How can religious experience combine these opposite elements? How can it arrive at what seems to be an impossible outcome, a *contradictio in adjecto*? By virtue of a mysterious mental power we assert the source of man's creativity and the certificate of his divine origin: his productive imagination.

It is the distinctive function of this human faculty to synthesize the polar elements of man's mind: the pole of sensation and the pole of reason.<sup>1</sup> It spiritualizes the sphere of sensation and makes it so transparent that abstract ideas or concepts can pierce it or flash up in it. Religious imagination, moreover, makes manifest not only what can be conceived by reason in only an abstract way, but illustrates what cannot be conceived in any abstract way; it solves the problem which reason cannot solve, but which is nevertheless envisaged by reason as the ultimate aim of all speculation. Spiritual imagina-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my Bedell Lectures on *The Religious Function of Imagination*, Yale University Press, 1941.



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tion "schematizes" the supreme Ideal of Reason, to use Kantian terms.<sup>2</sup> But this expression is misleading, since it may suggest that man's mind is able to produce this image out of its own energy. This is not so. Man can apply his energy to intellectual inquiries, investigations, experiments, observations, and so forth; or he can direct his energy to practical affairs, and act in the natural world. But man cannot apply himself to productive imagination, to creation in the religious and poetical sphere. It is the peculiar mystery of this power that it is not man's power in a strict sense; the gift of imagination must be bestowed on man. Spiritual creation is an act of grace. It is not his achievement; it is the fruit of "inspiration." This weighty term expresses exactly the mystery of productive imagination as being conveyed and transmitted by a spirit higher than man's own. Man's imagination is both passive and active whenever it is operative in the spiritual realm. True, that man acts; but true, too, that he knows not how.

Of course there is a difference between religious and poetical imagination and inspiration and this difference is of the greatest importance. The poet, Schelling says, is a born pagan. The muse he invokes belongs to the train of Minerva, not to the angelic host. I shall recur to this matter in due course. It must suffice here to point out that the specific religious imagi-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Trans. by Th. M. Greene, 1934, p. 58, footnote, where Kant is speaking of the "schematism" of analogy, with which (as a means of explanation) we cannot dispense; "the Scriptures too accommodate themselves to this mode of representation," he says.

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nation, as distinct from aesthetic and mythological imagination, has a moral and speculative character and value. It grapples with the knowledge of ultimate reality or of the Absolute (whereas aesthetic pursuits concern the world of finite objects and of finite man). But how can imagination provide us with any truth at all? How can we put any trust in such a dubious source? How can we ever be assured that the products of imagination are true expressions of God's own revelation, and not only arbitrary and playful inventions of man's fancy?

It must be admitted that there is no possible proof whatsoever that could vindicate truth of this kind, since every proof necessarily presupposes just the existence of the revelation as such, and secondly, the credibility or authenticity of definite witnesses or divine messengers. It must be acknowledged that no rational or empirical demonstration can make up for faith, if faith be lacking. But this is precisely the function of faith, to supersede all other sources of certainty in the knowledge of God. He who demands other sources does not understand the meaning and the nature of this knowledge. He is still trying to minimize the difference between it and scientific knowledge. He pays homage secretly or covertly to the idol of a scientific or speculative knowledge of the living God. He, on the other hand, who has recognized this difference cannot wish to replace that specific knowledge rooted in faith by any knowledge derived from rational and empirical means.

Even if we, as pure rationalists and not as believers, assume that there is a living God, we must conclude that the only way we can be assured of His existence is the

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way of His own revelation and of inspired imagination. If it were possible to ascertain His existence by rational means alone, He would be an idea, a concept, an ideal, but not the living God; if it were possible, on the other hand, to ascertain His existence by empirical means, as the Experimentalists and Empiricists in religion hold, He would be an empirical force or factor, but not the Absolute Being. Faith is the accurate and the adequate attitude of finite man towards the self-revelation of God. And this self-revelation is the accurate and adequate form in which ultimate reality can make itself known to finite man. This inspired imagination is enabled, therefore, of inner necessity to present the living God as the source of its knowledge, or to deem itself inspired by Him, by His Holy Spirit. It is led of inner necessity to the conception of divine revelation. A revealing and holy imagination alone can convey to us the knowledge of God. If we do not trust this source, if we do not follow the messenger, and if we do not believe in the message, it is our fault, not the fault of the "method" of which the greatest teacher avails Himself to teach us His will. Such instruction affords an instrument higher than that of logical demonstration. If logical demonstration could perform the task performable by inspired imagination alone, how could God distinguish between those who believe in His Holy Word and those who do not believe in it? Yet it seems to be His will that this distinction should become manifest, and on its basis we are judged.

Thus, logical demonstration shows the indispensability of non-logical imagination as the necessary and only possible medium or channel or communication whereby

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God enters the mind of man. It shows that knowledge so acquired should be an element in the living faith, not an isolated, autonomous, self-dependent, logical or rational doctrine. If God is Spirit—and this is the special message of the Christian revelation—He cannot be known as we know finite things, entities, laws, principles, propositions, ideas, or concepts; He can be known only in so far as He makes Himself known by covenanting with His people, that is, by communing with man's spirit; and the only possible vehicle of this communication is the inspired mind of man. By inspiration God speaks to man in man's imagination, as the inner cell of man's spirit; it is the holy sanctuary where God and man meet. The danger, however, of a false interpretation of the images arising in man's imagination is obvious. Man is tempted to mistake minor images and unholy voices as authentic messages from the highest source. The sacred "canon" of Scripture was never fixed with an absolute approval of all ecclesiastical authorities responsible. There will ever be some doubt as to the divine origin of this or that writing or passage. But the principle of inspiration is nevertheless inescapable. Doubt can be raised only if the principle itself is acknowledged, and all argument rests on this premise.

Philosophical reflection leads to the conviction that the Absolute cannot be something short of the supreme spirit, although speculation cannot fully grasp the nature of this spirit, and even less the form of its existence. The Absolute or the ultimately real must be spirit. Spirit alone can embrace—of course, in a spiritual way—the world of finite things and beings, while no physical en-

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tity, none of "the things visible" is thus comprehensive. It must be spirit, "blowing where it listeth," and not a concept or an idea, not even the highest idea such as the idea of the Good. Spirit alone includes—in a spiritual way again—all concepts and ideas; no concept and no idea can ever include the ultimately real or indeed any reality at all. The spiritual way of embracing things and concepts is the only way which we can conceive as the vesture of an absolute intellect, of the supreme spirit, in other words.

If this argument is correct, we must conclude that inspired imagination is the only means whereby we finite men can attain to a knowledge of this supreme spirit. Spirit is not a factor to be discovered by experiments; it is to be discerned in the same way that the finite spirit of one man reaches the finite spirit of another man—that is, by listening to his utterances, by making his acquaintance in life as lived in his company. The difference is that finite man has a visible appearance, while the supreme and infinite spirit, though incarnate in Christ and apparent in those whose natures are godly, is invisible, otherwise living beyond the confines of the finite world. He assumes a visible appearance if a human spirit is enabled to envisage Him through the medium of His veil; if, that is, the veil becomes transparent for him who recognizes the face of the infinite. The believer, by faith, penetrates the cloud.

Knowledge of God is thus essentially and necessarily bound up with religious or spiritual imagination. There is a cognitive element in faith, and this element, because it is only an element and not self-subsistent, must be in

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the manner of an image that implies something beyond what is possible for a concept. An image or a name can be holy as no concept ever can. Such an image can be more closely connected than can a concept with the supreme Being of which it is the reflection. Concepts are empty of even imagined voice or visage.

### C. MYSTICAL FELLOWSHIP

The knowledge of God is based on a living fellowship with the object of this knowledge. The association between the object known and the knowing subject thus differs from what we find in the field of scientific or philosophical knowledge, because the religious object is no object at all in a strict sense of that word, but rather a subject akin with the knowing subject. We cannot follow God without knowing Him, and we cannot know Him without following Him. Knowing and following are inseparably bound up together, as they are in every fellowship. We cannot know God without revering, obeying, trusting, loving Him. We know Him as Father. There is a sense in which the knowledge of God is both empirical and speculative. It is impossible to know Him as Father without following Him practically in the empirical way that a son in the family follows his own father; and it is impossible to know Him as God the Almighty without knowing Him in the metaphysical way the thinking mind represents the Ideal of Reason, for otherwise he would be an empirical father of empirical sons only. He is both the object of an empirical and of a speculative knowledge, but all the same he is neither the one nor the other.

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We can call this synthesis "mystical." Indeed, knowledge of God always is mystical, because it is non-logical and none the less speculative, or because it is empirical and none the less non-logical. The metaphysical experienced in a personal way is the mystical. If God were an idea only, the "Absolute Idea" as he is in the system of Hegel, our knowledge would be logical. If He were a particular person only, even the highest in rank, our knowledge would be empirical, as it is in the theology of the empiricists. But now, He is both the highest person and the Absolute Idea at the same time and in identity. Therefore the knowledge of Him necessarily must be mystical: an empirical knowledge of Him who is no empirical being, a metaphysical knowledge of Him who is not an idea, not a concept but a real being. God is a mystical being, as Christ is a mystical being, for God is revealed as the Father of all men by Christ.

The knowledge of God is intrinsically mystical, because it is an *empirical* knowledge of a *transcendent* being. Such a knowledge is impossible apart from inspired imagination. This is why every theological concept in dogmatics appears to be so inadequate. All such concepts leave the impression that it is possible to know God though by revelation nevertheless in a conceptual or theoretic fashion; as if it were possible to know God as we know physical energies and chemical affinities, the origin of the species or of the solar system, the rules of logic or the categories of the intellect. But the truth is that we do not know Him in any such manner. We only know Him by following Him, when our imagination is illuminated by the revealing words of Scripture

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or of its interpreters. We know Him in the living process of adoration, prayer, service, and moral obedience. Thus it is a mystical activity whereby we know Him.

Even if we suppose that all limitations to our knowledge were completely removed, that we could know Him as He really is, we would not cease to know Him in a living way. To know Him otherwise would be to contradict His reality and to return to mere metaphysical contemplation and reflection. The element of mystery is inherent in the very idea of the knowledge of the Supreme Being, and this element requires a corresponding element of the mystical on the part of the knowing subject. Even the angels, to speak in the imaginative language of spiritual insight, know God similarly, that is, by participating in His eternal glory and majesty, by praising and rejoicing in His divine power and love. This kind of certainty being mystical, stands in contrast with all empirical and metaphysical types of certainty. It is a certainty not of the isolated intellect, but only of the intellect in union with the heart. *Mystical* imagination is the cognitive instrument of this union. And this instrument cannot be replaced, let alone surpassed by any rational methods.

The knowledge of God is mystical in that it is a personal fellowship with the Creator and Ruler of the universe, who remains a mystery even when He reveals Himself. Therefore, no transference of epistemological theories from the scientific to the religious sphere is effective. For God is no finite thing, no energy, no factor, no particular entity. He does not appear in the world of sense except to those eyes which are open to the divine



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presence, that is, in a way mystical and even miraculous, so that the apparent thing or event, the spoken word and the visible deed, are the outer side of an inner meaning, perceptible only to the inspired mind. The religious mind is neither mere intellect nor mere sensation. It is perceiving, thinking, and feeling at the same time. Its root is inspired imagination. Spiritual experience, therefore, is just the opposite of scientific and philosophical knowledge. For whereas science and philosophy are based on outer certainty and proceed to theories erected by the intellect, in religion outer experience is only the confirmation of inner spiritual certainty.

The course of religion leads from within toward the outer world; the way of science from the outer world toward the inner sphere of theories and theses, of concepts and inferences. As the lover discovers in the whole world, in the flowers and blossoms, in the sky and on the earth, the object of his love or something that reminds him of his beloved, so the devoted soul discovers in the universe traces and signs of the Infinite Spirit. Would the lover yield to the protests if a critic objected to the kind of certainty he attains in his experience on the grounds that it is personal only and therefore lacks the fundamental presupposition of all certainty, namely, objectivity? He would likely reply that he has sufficient assurance already.

#### D. REALISM AND IDEALISM

If we try to find a path from epistemological theories concerning scientific knowledge to a corresponding theory of religious knowledge, we should not disregard the

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enormous chasm in the two realms between the respective sources of certainty and between the structures of the knowing subject and the object known. We shall no longer be induced to believe that thoroughgoing parallelism is to be expected. So-called epistemological realism cannot imply the same application when related to scientific and to spiritual knowledge. A realistic theory maintaining that the things we perceive are real things and not only existing in our perceiving mind, cannot be applied to the knowledge of God for the simple reason that God is not a thing perceived, and that the knowing subject is not a perceiving mind. Indeed, the things surrounding us are only real in the sense in which the perceiving mind takes this term. They are not ultimately real because we do not perceive them in the light of ultimate truth. Ultimately they belong precisely to that sphere which cannot be perceived, because it is known and can be known only in the spiritual sight. To use the old phrase, which is still true: the things surrounding us are real only if we "see them in God."

God, consequently, is more real than the things surrounding us; indeed, these things are real only through and in Him. For it is God who embraces the world, not the world that embraces God. Therefore an epistemology, realistic in a deeper sense of this ambiguous term, is entitled to adoption in the field of the knowledge of God. Since God is ultimate reality, we are right in taking Him realistically by faith. Indeed, it would be absurd to suppose that by faith we grasp the *image* of God only and not God *Himself*. Such an interpretation would destroy the meaning of faith and distort the theory of

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religious imagination which I am seeking to make clear. It would thwart the very ideas of inspiration and revelation. It is, in its very truth, the real, the living God who meets us and whom man meets by means of inspired imagination, even though the image of God does not reveal Him in the full extent of His reality, or even though He does not reveal Himself to us in all His power. But a certain *idealism* is intrinsically implied in this *realism* of spiritual knowledge. Precisely because God is not a finite Being, but the Infinite Spirit, the Ideal Subject, the Universal Will, our capacity for conceiving the idea of the Absolute is involved in the knowledge of God. Only an idealistic realism or a realistic idealism can fully appreciate and interpret the sublimity of this knowledge. The realism has to be *idealistic*, because the reality of God is the reality of an ideal; and the idealism has to be *realistic*, because the ideal is presented in the form of a real Being. Sense perception as such can never present an *ideal* reality, and intellectual conception can never present the *reality* of the ideal. It is the unique performance of spiritual, that is, inspired and imaginative apprehension to combine both the reality and the ideality of the supreme object and of the supreme subject of all knowledge.

Inspired imagination considered as the instrument of revelation is the only mental faculty that can associate the extremes of realism and idealism in such a perfect unity, thus enabling us to "perceive" the Supreme Being as a real entity, but without the *empirical realism* of sense perception; and also enabling us to "conceive" the Supreme Idea, but without the *rational idealism* of phil-

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osophic thought. The Platonism of Christian philosophy from Origen to Malebranche, the so-called "realism of the universals," interprets—I might say misinterprets—the religious idealistic realism or realistic idealism of the knowledge of God in terms of philosophic speculation. To be sure, there is a certain kind of spiritual and mystical imagination alive in Plato himself. It is this imagination which the medieval "realists" underlined in their epistemological theories, and against which the "nominalists" protested, when they insisted on a knowledge of God rooted in faith. And the nominalists were right. For it is not the universal that is real, as we conceive it, but God alone as we comprehend or apprehend Him on the ground of His revelation.

From this point of view I can wholeheartedly agree with the dictum of Karl Barth, that the Platonic Idea of the Good, compared with the living God, is a mere idol. It is not our imagination which transmutes the abstract idea into the concrete image. It is God Himself who appears in all His majesty within the image of our mind. To be sure, I abandon the language of philosophic thought if I speak of God as appearing in our mind, and I adopt the language of religion. But precisely this change is urged by an analysis of the knowledge of God. For we have reached the utter limit of philosophic thought when we confront the problem of how God enters the human mind and upon the vast stage of human history.

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## LECTURE V

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### THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

#### A. HISTORY OF RELIGIONS AND HISTORICAL RELIGION

There is a twofold relation between religion and history. Religion is a historical power, growing out of the dim and distant past, unfolding its latent tendencies, changing with the changing spirit of the historical movement, influencing other processes and influenced by them, tinged by and itself tinging the particular character of the events and peoples involved. Accordingly, the knowledge of God as rooted in faith depends on this historical process and on its contingent and secular circumstances. In a word, such knowledge has a historical element. But a second relation obtains between religion and history; history, on its side, can be envisaged from the religious point of view, that is, in the light of spiritual knowledge. History then appears as the manifestation of the will of God, as a course designed by Providence, as the stage of God's activity arranged by Himself.

These two different or even opposite aspects of the relation between history and religion should not be confused, as they often are, for the result of such confusion can only be fatal to the understanding. Either religion is subjugated to the historical categories, as is the case

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in the so-called historical relativism or *historism*, a philosophical outlook that makes history the very center and the supreme principle of all philosophy—indeed, the very religious outlook itself. Or history is imprisoned within the religious cast of mind. This entails the destruction of empirical, scientific history and of historical criticism, and finally of historical truth in the interest of a religious *fundamentalism*. Both distortions are to be avoided by distinguishing the two different or opposite forms of the relation between religion and history.

We can look upon religion, or more precisely, upon definite and particular religions, as historical phenomena to be examined and analyzed by the scientific historian. History is here treated as predominant, and religion as a mere historical phenomenon that appears and vanishes in the course of time. Alternatively we can look upon the course of events in history from the religious standpoint. In this case religion is treated as predominant and history is only an aspect of God's creation and maintenance of the universe. The confusion of these two possibilities arises not only from a failure to draw a clear distinction between them. It has a deeper origin. Even if we maintain the distinction between religious and historical knowledge and uphold it in all its logical consequences, there remains a problem of the greatest import which is almost incapable of solution. This problem is how to arrive at the right relation between the two opposite approaches to man's life on this planet, how to determine ultimately the preponderance of the one or the other.

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We cannot avoid this question, and the answer whether of historicism or fundamentalism is an attempt, from one or another point of view, at a solution of this grave crisis. Such answers, of course, do less than full justice to the profundity and to the difficulty of the problem, and therefore do not solve it finally. Historicism intimidates religion, fundamentalism terrorizes history, and indeed, science as well. Yet it should be possible to find a just compromise, granting to each side its legitimate claims, without violating the claims of the other one. But even if this conciliation has been effected the question of preponderance still remains. Either the historical or the religious outlook must ultimately have primacy. If the historical outlook prevails, religion and especially the elements of knowledge and truth in religion are endangered. If the religious outlook wins precedence historical knowledge may be reduced to a secondary value, yet this may be its real value in the ultimate scheme of things. It seems, therefore, that the second possibility is to be preferred as a solution of the problem.

We speak of Christianity as a historical religion. But the term is as ambiguous as the entire relation between religion and history. In a way every religion is historical: every religion has a historical origin, a historical development, a historical career and a historical destiny. Even the most primitive religions are not to be excluded from this rule. It is true that some of them have a quasi-natural existence without any historical consciousness, but they are historically related to other religions. Even when the groups or tribes have not yet developed a historical consciousness, their religions may have a historical signifi-

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cance. Christianity on the other side is a historical religion not only in the general sense in which every religion is historical, but also in a particular sense. For history has a special religious function within the Christian faith. It is included in the belief in God. The belief in God implies a belief in history. For it is a belief in God as the Ruler over history, as the Lord of history, and therefore a belief in history as governed by God. The *knowledge of God* is thus definitely a *historical knowledge*. God is not only the Lord of history, He is involved in the historic destiny of mankind. The strongest expression of this historical aspect of the Christian religion is the belief in Jesus Christ, who as Son of God was also Son of David. Thus the spirit of God, though eternal, is also a historic spirit. God is life. It is perhaps the greatest paradox in the Christian conception of God.

How can the Eternal come to be temporal, how can the Absolute come to be historical? If we define "history" in the modern manner as an empirical research into, and reconstruction of, what happened in the past, it must seem incredible that God should have entered such a secular scene. Indeed, this creed appears as a remnant of the spirit of ancient times which had not yet distinguished between facts and legends—a period in which scholars had not learned to look at historical sources with a critical eye; in which, therefore, they confused mythological fancy with genuine historical accuracy. From this point of view the fusion of the opposite elements of the eternal and the temporal, of the absolute and the relative, of the divine and the human, seems simply to be confusion—a childish blend of products of our imagination



HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD with real events and occurrences. But the fusion is by no means so simple a matter as that. Modern history, though superior in its critical vigilance and in its scholarly conscience to earlier historians, is more remote than they from a just appreciation of faith and creed. It is thus inferior in the interpretation of the true meaning of the historical aspect of the knowledge of God. The union of those extremes in history which we are prone to separate from each other is the fulfillment of an urgent postulate of reason itself, although it is not by reason that reason is satisfied.

#### B. THE SUPERIORITY OF LIFE OVER HISTORY

The term "history" has a double meaning. It signifies the knowledge of the past (*res scriptae*) and the past itself (*res gestae*). The Latin words suggest that we consider one and the same thing from two different sides. In both cases, history means the *past*. In one sense the past is surveyed as something *known*, in the other sense the past is defined as something *real*. And indeed both aspects are intrinsically bound together. The past is not "history" in the sense of reality without having been seen through the eyes of a historian, and "history" in the sense of knowledge embraces reality seen with these eyes. The historical aspect, the historical categories, the historical selection, and the historical valuation are necessary conditions of the very nature of history as a directed stream of events. There is no historic world without a historical mind apprising this world. The historic world loses reality if we try to abstract from it the mind that records it.

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The historic world, in other words, is not the ultimately real, the absolute world, the world as such. It is a special section of the world, a special scene delineated by the interests and the questions of the mind, no matter how correct the answers, and how rational or legitimate the interest may be. Therefore, historism is wrong in exaggerating the historical aspect and exalting it to metaphysical status. The content of what has happened in the past is not seized in its full reality and meaning by the historian. It can be grasped and arranged as history, but this does not exhaust the entire truth and the complete scope of what happened. The historian at times fills the role of a seer turning back to the past, a prophet who interprets the secret meaning of human life. But he may be a false prophet, who misinterprets this life. The scientific historian of our day has no other intention than to know and to present what has really happened.

Past times have still another reality and meaning than that grasped by the narrow view of history. Every historic person, every historic resolve, and every historic success or failure, all emotions and passions, all striving and driving, all industry and all sufferings of persons now dead—all these incidents of the historic world are treated as links in a great chain, drops in the stream of times. They are explored and explained as causes and effects following one another, determining one another, and determined by one another. It is an interpretation which is legitimate within the scheme of scientific history, but it is far from being the only possible aspect of the past. It transforms real life into the product of a relentless machinery, into a ghostly march of shadowy figures, into

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a parade of puppets like those pictures seen by the fettered men in Plato's den. The real models of those copies are behind the onlookers and unseen by them. The light thrown upon the historic scene is an artificial light, not the original sun, not the light of absolute truth. It is a tormented attitude that the historian has to assume—not the "natural" glance at life. It is not with historical eyes that we look at one another, for if we were to do this we should lose our living interest, our living emotions. We should take an illusory stand. The historian may glory in his serene calm, his impartial objectivity, the aloofness he preserves in contemplating the human passions and desires which rage on the historic scene and agitate the actions of persons and groups. But *life in its actuality is infinitely more than history*. It contains these aspects that such history excludes, which to the living is almost the whole of it.

History could never be written and reality could never become historical if actual life had not been lived beforehand. The past could never be recorded if it had not been first a present. And this precedence concerns not only temporal sequence, but also the order of rank. The present is not merely just another point on the infinite line of temporal points following one another. It is a normative point, a point which in a definite way does not belong to this line at all, because it is the turning point between the past and the future. The present decrees the future; it is the immediate actuality of life, the only time in which man really acts. The past always is meditated; it is no longer *life*, but only the *image* of former life. Acting in the present, man does not contemplate the

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flux of time, he does not contemplate himself as acting in the present. Rather he acts, and acting, he transforms the future into the present. He generates the present by carrying out his purpose or actualizing his destiny. Actual life, preserving the past and directed toward the future, unites the past and the future in the present and by the present. This is the unique significance of the present. The present is the creative instant, while past is only re-presented, and future is no more than anticipated. The superiority of life over history rests upon this predominance of the present.

There is an important difference between the image of the past, living in the memory of a person, and exercising a certain influence on his will and his actions, and to that extent on the shaping of the future on the one hand, and history on the other hand. History in the modern sense of the word is a science that aims at objective truth. It has no immediate and actual function in life, except the function shared with every science of presenting the truth. The objectivity of historical world as presented by the historian contrasts with the subjectivity of actual life and is a product of scientific scholarship. This objectivity has to be distinguished from the actuality of the living memory that, in spite of its arising out of the imagination, participates in our present life. This distinction is not necessarily clear-cut. There are many stages of transition between the personal images of the memory and the impersonal representation of the modern historian. But the more history becomes the result of scientific studies, the more it approaches an objectivity akin to that of the natural sciences.

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A German school of logicians of history have asserted that there is no difference in principle between the natural and the historical sciences as to their objectivity of aim. Whether or not this is to the point, in any case, a wide gulf separates the record of the historian from the living and transmitted memory of the individual and of society. I have outlined a classification of the sciences based on the theory that mathematics represent the extreme of objectivity and history the other extreme of subjectivity, and that the sciences can be regarded as a series in which the character of objectivity is gradually decreasing and the character of subjectivity gradually increasing; and that the most objective sciences are the most remote from the full actuality of life, while history, if we leave philosophy and theology out of account, is the nearest to it. Even so, historical knowledge is still objective compared with the products of personal memory.

Not only has the individual a living memory, the group also remembers its past. This group memory serves the life of the group as the individual memory functions in that of the individual. Every community has memorials recalling its past. It preserves remembrances in its usages and habits, its customs and manners, its valuations and convictions, its sayings and in its very language. In short, it preserves the past like a living monument embodied within its soul and life. And it preserves the past not only unconsciously by instinct, but also consciously in commemorations, anniversaries, medals, speeches in memory of persons and events, and so on. This living history is a factor in the actual life of the group, it fulfills a definite

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need within organized society. It is a spiritual heritage which supports the actual interests and the present obligations of a nation, a party, an institution, or a city. Memories, though the remembered persons thus celebrated are no longer living members of the community, are living figures guiding and protecting and interpreting and inspiring successive generations. The most potent factors in any community's life are the images of the dead.

Sometimes the figures of the past become legendary. This means they embody ideas and ideals still existing in the community and controlling their conduct and their activity. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to suggest that every person who has had a deep influence upon the spirit and the development of a community attains in due course to a legendary status—this because life in the present participates in the record of life in the past. Legend expresses the importance, the implication, the power of the remembered person or of his deeds for the life and the future of the community to which he belonged and made his contribution. This note of legend, therefore, is not an arbitrary and falsifying addition to the historical truth. It fulfills a positive function in the soul of the community. It expresses a truth hardly to be expressed in another fashion. C. C. J. Webb mentions in his book on *The Historical Element In Religion* the story of William Tell, the hero of Switzerland, who is said to have killed the Austrian tyrant. Tell may or may not have lived, but the story has a vital bearing on the real circumstances and the real attitude of the Swiss people, and on their final victory over tyranny. Tell was

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what the Unknown Soldier is in our more sober and historically trained age. He is the image of the Swiss nation itself, a living embodiment of its ideal life.

Such a legendary person is more significant and more pertinent to the historical reality than are thousand ever so well authenticated little events a historian may report. The legendary person belongs as much to the present as he belongs to the past and to the future; he is a living link between all times and all generations. He expresses not only a historical, but also an eternal truth, namely, the truth essential to the ideal of the nation or of another community. We speak of the symbolic truth of legends. Indeed, the historical truth is, in spite of its scientific objectivity, less important to the life of a group than the legendary truth which symbolizes its creed, its soul, its ideals, its will. And truth is not less a truth because it is legendary—it is not more a truth because it be scientifically historical. Legendary truth is relevant to actual life, whereof scientific history is detached from it—a truth in isolation—a truth that does not as deeply motivate will and actions of the living generation on which has fallen the responsibility of living. In this sense legendary truth is more realistic than any documentary fact can ever be; it is more realistic because it is of greater significance for the real life. Washington has become such a legendary figure. In him history and the living memory of the American nation are merged together and the legendary splendor that forever illuminates his poetic image is more compelling than any historical details about him can possibly be or become.

The traditions of religious faith are more akin to the

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truth in legend than to truth in scientific history. In so far as the knowledge of God is historical or connected with historical records, it is a legendary form of knowledge. Indeed, the very term "legend" is derived from religious sources, and signifies the peculiar kind of record which is less concerned with scientific historicity than with the religious import of past events and deeds. Religious insight is primarily directed toward the ultimate meaning of world and life, and only secondarily toward historical truth. Even if religion reports historical facts it is still concerned, not with the facts as facts, but with the eternal meaning of facts as lamps of life.

The story of the original Fall as narrated in Genesis is an example of a legend more pertinent to the ultimate meaning of human life than all of the well-warranted events the historian may present put together. It sets forth the eternal situation of man in nature, the eternal story of man's guilt and punishment, narrated in the form of an actual occurrence. Religious imagination has accomplished a masterpiece in preserving this story.<sup>1</sup> Biology and psychology can search for and define the laws governing the course of man's life, but in themselves they cannot find out the meaning of these facts, much less the ultimate meaning of life itself. History can discover and recover what happened in the past, but it cannot interpret the relation between the historical facts and metaphysical or spiritual truth. This truth is at least

<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with this subject more explicitly in my Gifford Lectures on *The Primacy Of Faith*, The Macmillan Company, 1943.



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as important for the conduct and the hopes and the ideals of life as the total volume of scientific details.

Life has many aspects. It has a natural aspect and it has a historical aspect, both of which are open to the scrutiny of the scientist. But life is also related to the standpoint of the living man himself. He can look at life as the owner of private property or as a man mostly interested in his own pleasure, as a member of a party, of his city, of his nation, of his church, and so forth. Or he can look more deeply into the ultimate meaning of life. Whatever his outlook may be, he must pay attention to the fact that life is not a static, stable structure, but involves ceaseless movement and change. And therefore his outlook must be interwoven with remembrances—remembered experiences, remembered impressions of all kinds—sensuous, intellectual, emotional, volitional. It is evident that all experiences and impressions contributing something to the interpretation of the meaning of life belong to the same realm and form a series of contents mutually connected, integrating with one another, clarifying or enriching one another.

The development of this process in the mind of mankind represents a living narrative of the revelation of God. The images of this memory necessarily merge with the image of God Himself, and the entire area of this historical and religious imagination attains a certain intimacy which separates it from the other provinces of the mind. The spirit of God and the spirit of man collaborate in this holy companionship. It is not only man's religious knowledge, it is God Himself who develops our fellowship with him in this *living history*. The life of God and

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the life of man are thus bound together. God as a teacher and educator follows the stages of man's inner development. The history of man thus becomes at the same time *a history of God*. History is elaborated as a kind of majestic intercourse—an awe-inspiring dialogue—between God and man.

### C. HISTORY, DRAMA, AND EPIC

Some may suggest that we should abandon the term "history" in this sense. We should distinguish this inner development of God and man, this living dialogue between them, from the scientific and objective—the secular—history of modern times. But it is difficult to find any better word than "history" to convey so large a meaning. One might propose the word "drama." Indeed, it is a dramatic development at which I hint. But the word "drama" connotes a work in the aesthetic sphere, a product of poetical imagination that we can enjoy in contemplating it, something that is made to be contemplated. Our life is not such a product and cannot be contemplated as a work of art. Indeed, it ought not to be contemplated from such a viewpoint, since we ourselves are involved in it. We *are* not—we are not *permitted* to be—mere spectators only. We ourselves are the actors, the agents of our acts—we are the responsible authors of our life conduct, and no poet, not even the Creator of this transcendent drama, can lift the burden of this responsibility from us. God is no mere poet, we not mere actors in a drama in which we learn to play a part. God and we are rather coactors. To be sure, our life, though not a drama in the literal sense, is by far more

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akin to a drama than it is to a natural process or to a scientific, historical record. The poet who describes and interprets human life is a more discerning metaphysician than the biologist and the historian. For life is not a natural or a historical process, but rather an interplay of influences between persons, and ultimately life is a corresponding dialogue between God and man.

But God is not a dramatic figure. The gods of antiquity could participate in ancient drama, because they were not transcendent and universal. They lacked these qualities of the Biblical God. This is why the ancient drama was more religious in the ancient sense than the modern drama can ever be. The Biblical God is not a particular deity among other deities like one of the gods of paganism. He is not the product of a religious imagination mastered and enriched by the poets. On the contrary, poetical imagination is mastered and controlled by the prophet and by the inspired writer, whose imagination is genuinely and exclusively spiritual. Here is imagination as a medium of God's own revelation. And this imagination is historical in the sense of living and legendary history that has a significance for our present situation. This fusion of the spiritual and the historical is possible because God is the Lord of Life and of History, the central Being in the nonfictitious, but historical drama of life itself. Such history is to some extent more akin to the *epic* than to drama. Indeed, history, if grasped by an author who has an understanding for the legendary import of historical facts, will appear as an epic. So is it with the history of America as depicted in the great panorama spread by James Truslow Adams.

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Epical poems like the *Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost* have a religious tenor because they use the images of the Scriptures and execute the aims of religious imagination by poetical means, whereas the ancient poets, even if they indulged in religious images, made poetry their chief goal. The epics of Greece and Rome were artistic creations, distinct from Biblical inspiration.

The unique achievement of that inspiration is to create a picture of life in its universal, therefore permanent significance. This is the objective, even though the medium may be historical images and historical records. "History" in this religious sense is the scene into which God the Almighty enters as an "historical" figure, the central figure in this cosmic drama or epic. He does not appear in history as an empirical science. If history be merely secular, Christianity is no historical religion at all. God is the central figure in the living, treasured history of His chosen people. It is His figure that transmutes the scene of life into a sanctuary. History is transformed through this light into a "universal legend," and God is in turn the very light of this legend.<sup>2</sup>

The philosopher might be tempted to say that God is then the ultimate meaning of life, personified. Still this phrase is inadequate and does less than full justice to the character of revelation. It is not man's imagination that personifies the otherwise abstract idea of ultimate mean-

<sup>2</sup> "The biblical revelation has one specific purpose. It does not aim to supply scientific or historical knowledge. . . . It brings us God—his will for us and our world, his grace by which we may obey it." (Henry Sloane Coffin, "The Scriptures", in *Liberal Theology, An Appraisal*, New York, 1942, p. 236).

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ing. On the contrary, this idea is abstracted from the concrete revelation (and religious experience) of God. The idea is, just because it is abstract, less adequate to the ultimate truth and to the ultimate solution of the metaphysical problems than is the image of the living God, revealed by Him and recorded by man. Religion in genuine revelation is superior to metaphysics, and it is superior also to secular poetry. Religious or inspired imagination is the imagination of the actually striving person, endangered both from within and from without, and always longing for the goal beyond. It is the imagination of man living, and not only intuiting his life. And therefore this imagination can join the recorded spiritual experiences of his life. Religious imagination can and must become "historical."

The historical imagination of religion is universal, for it embraces the destiny of all mankind. Its meaning encompasses the whole of the historical world, the whole of historical time. Such a history must be legendary, since no empirical process can perform this task, which is not only historical, but also metaphysical. The universal epic comprises all human existence; it solves the problem of ultimate reality in the form of history. Empirical, scientific history deals with the origin and the development of particular races, nations, states, persons in particular epochs and sections of the earth. Universal history is the account of the origin and the development of mankind everywhere. It interprets the meaning and the goal of all mankind. Biblical history satisfies all these requirements. Although it deals with the destiny of a particular people, this people is not selected by the arbi-

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trary or individual interest of the historian. The Hebrew race is selected by the universal will of the universal Lord and Judge of all mankind. It is not an empirical, but a chosen, a miraculous people that experiences its empirical fate in the light of ultimate truth; it experiences its own fate as the answer not to historical or scientific, but to metaphysical questions. It experiences its fate as the revelation of the ultimate meaning of human life, not in an abstract, philosophical manner, but in the concrete form of the life that we have to live. Israel's consciousness of life includes consciousness of the living God. Life is unfolded as nothing less than the revelation of its ultimate meaning interpreted by Him who has ordained it. It is the answer to the ultimate question, found not by the acumen of the speculative thinker, but by the Creator of heaven and earth.

Whereas secular fables and legendary tales interpret the will and the ideal goal of a particular group, of a nation, or of a state, the Biblical epic interprets the will and the ideal goal of man as such, of mankind as the community of the children of God. Therefore, these records reveal a truth that transcends history in the modern sense of the term reaching into the realm of metaphysics. They show the truth of life and the world in the mirror of remembrances of a particular people. It is this combination of the historical with the metaphysical that is the contribution of history to the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God can be historical because it is also the knowledge of man, the knowledge of human nature and destiny. The images of the past are religious and historical, if we take the word "historical" in the

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sense of a universal history of man as created in the image of God. Biblical history thus reveals the inner course of mankind, while empirical history exhibits the outer course of a particular group or isolated person. Biblical history fulfills the task which a *metaphysics of history* is supposed, but unable to fulfill, because the fusion between the abstract region of metaphysical ideas and the concrete region of the historical particularities can never be achieved satisfactorily. Biblical history is a kind of an empirical metaphysics based on inspired experiences and memories. Poetry can also be conceived as a kind (another kind!) of empirical metaphysics, but not as a metaphysical history. We can call the content of Biblical history the world drama or the cosmic epic, if we like metaphorical expressions. But we have to keep in mind the intrinsic difference between the religious and the poetic spheres.

Biblical history differs from drama and epic, for it concerns us not as spectators, but as participators who will and act. It depicts the universal truth of life seen in a universal frame, whereas the secular poem always presents a particular image. This difference characterizes not only the respective forms and contents of secular poetry and spiritual religion, but also the minds responsible for them. The poet is his own man. The spirit of the poet is his own particular, individual spirit. This is true even though the genius is not only an individual, but the representative of his race, and the oldest epic poems seem to be the result of group imagination. The spirit of the prophet, on the other hand, belongs not only to himself, not only to his nation, not even to mankind.

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It is the spirit of the universal, ideal self called God in the language of revelation. Even though the prophet be an individual, a member of an individual community, he is as a prophet the medium of the absolute spirit. Poetry can be compared with *empirical* history in that it is *particular*; revealed history with *metaphysics*, in that the latter is *universal*. But revealed history is not only universal. It combines the *universality* of metaphysics with the *imaginative* character of epic and with the immediate *actuality* of the living memory that is patent in actual life, and makes the past a present reality.

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On this unique combination depends the tremendous strength of the Bible. It synthesizes the ideality of imagination with the reality of life, the truth of insight and wisdom with historical record, not through perfunctory and occasional confluence of factors or of reflections superimposed upon the historical account, but through an indissoluble unification of the religious and the historical outlook. The Creation of the World appears as the first historical act, God as the first historical actor. Indeed, the image of the creation is not distinguished from the historical remembrances of the chosen people. It is envisaged on the same level as the oldest, the earliest historical event to be cherished.

God is thus a *remembered God*. He is "the Ancient of Days." His image is an image of memory. The knowledge of God is a *historical knowledge* according to the religious aspect of history or the historical aspect of religion, that



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is, according to the aspect of revelation. God is the Creator of the historical world. History is His in the double sense that history is initiated by Him and that He is the central person in its unfolding. Biblical history is as much the history of God as it is the history of man. God is a superhistorical Being as He is an extramundane, an invisible and eternal Being. But nonetheless He acts in history. History is in Him, but He is also in History. History is history only because God is involved in it; otherwise it would be a sequence of facts and deeds, of acts and sufferings, without any deep import and any real goal. History is history only, because there is a goal transcending all history; or because man living and striving in history knows that there is something beyond its confines.

This larger knowledge has found spiritual expression in Biblical history. The "beyond" is God who is also "within." Empirical history abstracts from this "beyond" and from the knowledge of it for the sake of scientific truth. Such abstraction is as legitimate as is any abstraction which makes feasible a methodical approach to a partial truth. But thus to discard the other and deeper truth embedded in religious knowledge in order to exalt historical truth and knowledge (in the empirical sense) is to substitute a part for the whole and to relapse into the error of historicism. This is the error that provokes hostility of the fundamentalists who are as right and as wrong as the historical relativists whom they oppose. Both battle for partial truths by supplanting the opposite partial truth with their own.

Man, therefore, is not only an historical being, if the

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term *historical* is taken solely in the empirical and scientific sense. He is *superhistorical* also. He knows the limit of the historical outlook: he knows God. It is this knowledge that underlies Biblical history. Man is not only a historical being, even if the term historical is taken to include religious knowledge. For this knowledge is not confined to the horizon of Biblical history; it embraces more than this, it is the knowledge of God not only as a historical actor, but also as the Eternal Father who is in heaven, outside the historical scene, outside historical time. God, the God who reveals Himself, is not only in history, He *includes* history and He *completes* history, as He has created it.

This is to say: man is not only memory, his mind is not only a recording mind. Man is aligned toward the future which is not yet historical and actual. As directed toward the future, he is striving, willing, and acting. Man is the actual and self-actualizing person we know best, because we experience ourselves as such every day, every hour. It is the fundamental to every empirical experience we have. The future is not a historical time dimension; history—in all meanings of the term—is restricted to the past as a recorded past. The future is thus outside the *historical* category. But it is within the category of *actual life*. Man planning the future, motivated by hope and fear, transcends the frame of history, save in so far as the living mind can remember the expectations of former times with respect to the future and the emotions incident to them. God is as much the Lord of the future as He is the Lord of the past; He is the Lord of actual life, ruling therefore as much over our

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memories as over our anticipations. He is as much the Fulfiller as the Creator of the actual world in which we live as beings who recall their past and who plan their future.

All religious expectations are concentrated on the reconciliation of God and man or the justification and sanctification of man: on paradise regained. In the religious consciousness of the Hebrew people this expectation was imaged in the figure of the Messiah. It is the unique significance of Christ that He was destined to be the Messiah and to bring about the final consummation of the historical or actual world. Accordingly Christ is as much an historical person as He is the end of *Biblical history* and the ultimate fulfillment of revelation. In the image of God as the Creator of the world, the Eternal appears to us as a historical actor. In the image of the Fulfiller, the historical actor Jesus appears to us as the eternal Christ. The circle of history closes around Him. The acts, Creation and the Fulfillment, are both historical and superhistorical. The *universal* God appears as a *particular* historical person, when He creates the world in seven days; the *particular* historical Jesus appears as the *universal* son of God, when He overcomes the historical world and returns to God. Faith in Christ thus loses its meaning if this metaphysical synthesis is denied and Jesus conceived as man only. For this reason, the Resurrection which, as a mirror, reflects this central religious experience, is central in the Christian faith. Christ is thus the highest synthesis conceivable. He unites not only *historical particularity* and *superhistorical universality*, but also the actuality of a *recorded*

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with the actuality of a *fulfilled expectation*: history, actual life, and the eternity of God are gathered together in one great burst of glory.

It is not only the greatest synthesis, it is also the most stupendous paradox. How can history be overcome in the midst of history? For though overcome by Christ, the historical world goes on, the struggles for existence and power, the national and individual ambitions are not extinguished, the sacrifice of blood, sweat, and tears is renewed again and again. God and world are still separated as before Christ came. Nothing seems to be changed. But this is true only for the *historical* observation that cannot penetrate the nature of *faith*. The work of Christ is not a work performed in history only: on the contrary, its very meaning everywhere transcends the historical horizon—not only the horizon of secular, scientific, but also the horizon of Biblical history itself, of the very images of religious memory, of which Christ was the Fulfillment. The Resurrection is at once a recorded and an eternal act of God.

In the presence of Christ risen, revelation transcends the frame of the historical world, of the particular scene on which happened the great event, of the religious meaning of the historical people to whom Christ belonged. It elevates the spirit of man above the level of recollection—above all historical images. It leads faith to its inward and spiritual realm; it *triumphs over* the *historical* character of the knowledge of God. And this triumph is won by a historical person in a historical period, and can therefore be recorded: the Resurrection

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is as much a historical occurrence (in the sense of Biblical or sacred history) as it is of a superhistorical meaning and import, of a meaning that exalts Christ into the life of God. This inner meaning is visible to the eyes of faith alone.<sup>8</sup> Christ is not risen from the dead if we comprehend the resurrection as an empirical part of the past. All that the historian can state is the fact that some persons have believed that He has risen, and that this belief has spread over the world—a statement that does not depend on the question whether the historian is a Christian or not. The empirical historian, in so far as he is this and nothing else, is necessarily and essentially blind to the spiritual truth.

In the sciences we confront objective and subjective truth as two kinds of truth distinguished by varying degrees of validity and certainty. Objective truth is truth regardless of whether anyone knows it and believes it or not; subjective truth is truth only in so far as someone knows it and believes it. Or more strictly expressed: objective truth is truth, subjective truth is a proposition supposed to be true by someone. This opposition, correct and illuminating as it is in the field of logical knowledge, is not to the point in the knowledge of God. The shrine of the spiritual truth is open only to those who believe, for it is necessary to be more than an empirical historian in order to have access to the holy place. Indeed, one must be a full human being endowed with a heart and with

<sup>8</sup> This point of view is stressed in a recent article by F. C. Grant: "The Christ of the Gospels," in *Religion in Life*, 1941. Cf. also my Commencement Address on "The Mystery of Time in the Mirror of Faith," in *Anglican Theo. Review*, April, 1943.

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imagination to find the way to religious belief. Religious knowledge is not subjective in the sense of the sciences; but it is also not objective in this sense. It is more than a supposition or assumption, it is more than an assent to proposition. It is rather a knowledge in which the believing subject himself is involved or included, and the truth of this knowledge does not exist at all without the consent of the knowing subject.

As the proposition: "I love a person" cannot be true if I do not believe in its truth, so the proposition: "Christ is the Saviour" cannot be true, if none exists who believes in its truth. If Jesus had found no followers, or if His disciples had not believed Him to be the Messiah, we would not only be unable to state that He was the Messiah, but the very question would be irrelevant. His Messiahship was not an objective fact, to be examined and tested by any scientific means whatsoever. It was and it is and it will ever remain *a relation between Him and the believer*. It is a fact that cannot be stated without faith. It is in this sense that the knowledge of God is subjective. This is the reason why the records of the evangelists are of such an immense significance and why they have an irreplaceable value.<sup>4</sup> It is by faith they have been written. The evangelists have recorded at

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Dodd says in his admirable book on *The Authority of the Bible*: "The manner in which the story is told by the evangelists is in fact part of the story as the value Jesus had for those who followed Him is part of what He was" (p. 226). I did not know the writings of Professor Dodd when I delivered the Hewett Lectures, but I found many confirmations of my views in them subsequently. They contain deep insights into the nature of religious knowledge.

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once the facts and their spiritual meaning. Their testimony is therefore not so much a source of empirical historiography, as a source of superempirical and super-historical faith. They have written not only in the document of human annals, but in the book of eternity: in the living heart of mankind. Their records, therefore, are not only archives telling of things past; they are inscribed with things present in all times. And it is infinitely more important for mankind that the faith which lives in these documents is preserved and transmitted than that the scientific truth about their historical origin is discovered.

It is a paradox that he who wishes to know whether or not the Biblical records are true cannot be a spectator enjoying the neutrality of a scientific historian. The truth of these records is not an objective truth concerning facts. It is a spiritual truth concerning the meaning of facts. Such a truth is objective and subjective at the same time; neither aspect can be omitted. A certain school today calls a truth of this kind "existential." We are so much accustomed to the scientific standard of truth that it is hard for us to admit that there are other standards as important as those of scientific objectivity, or even more important than those. But it is the peculiar nature of religious truth to be open to him alone who has an intimate access to it, to him who attains it as the lover attains to the certainty of his love or the aesthete to the enjoyment of beauty in nature or in art. These comparisons should not conceal the momentous differences between the respective spheres of experience and of existence. They must not minimize the tremendous weight and the unique

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essence of religious truth. But they are appropriate to illuminate the inwardness or intimacy that is inseparably connected with the knowledge of God. "The character of combined ultimacy and intimacy," C. C. J. Webb says, "is the hall-mark of religion." I do not know of a better description. It is my summary and conclusion.

Only because we know God in a personal and spiritual way intimately and ultimately at the same time, can this knowledge be the rock on which we take our stand in life—here is a vantage point superior to anybody of objective knowledge, as the meaning of life is superior to biological or historical facts, the Eternal superior to the temporal, the purpose of God superior to the laws of nature and to the secular events of human history.



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